

悪霊だつてイケ!

下

小野不由美



Chapter 8 - August 13th, 11:00 pm - 12 midnight

1

“...there’s no one here anymore.”

Naru gave me a small smile as I raised my eyes to stare fixedly at his white face.

“Look closely.”

Saying that, his white hand pointed towards one of the walls. The wall he pointed at became transparent.

I stared intently. Not only the wall, but also the floor and just about everything became transparent. Only the thin outline of the classroom remained within the darkness. Several lights were flying there.

“There are a great deal of will-o’-the-wisps gathering in the first floor waiting room...”

“Yeah. They’re in there right now. Do you see anything else?”

“They’re moving around unsteadily.”

Small, white will-o’-the-wisps were drifting around the first floor corridor. Upon counting the number, there were twenty-one.

“And then?”

After he asked me, I questioned him in return.

“And then?”

“What else?”

I surveyed my surroundings once again. I noticed a few bright lights were visible.

The light that was immediately visible was tinged pink. When I looked more closely, I could see a figure within the light. It was my figure sitting there.

I could see a faint red light in the classroom next door. I could also see a figure within that light.

“...Bou-san.”

Bou-san was in the room next door. He was leaning on the wall and appeared to be contemplating something.

“...he’s alive...?”

The moment I said that, an image passed through my mind. I made my way half-way up the stairs. Even though I looked up the stairs, there was no one there. Even when I searched the second floor, there was no one there.

..hmm.

I looked over at Naru, who was smiling beside me.

“Perhaps, to Bou-san, we’re the ones who disappeared?”

“Right.”

“Well then, is it like that for everyone? John and Masako... everyone?”

“That’s right. Probably.”

Naru’s voice was very gentle.

When I turned my gaze toward the first floor, several figures were visible in the entry hall. John was pacing around while reciting something. Naru was sitting against the wall. Yasuhara-san was sitting next to him. Masako was standing on the opposite side. Each of them was encircled by a faint light. For the most part, it was a white light, however, it was very lightly colored.

I could see Ayako and Lin-san walking in the first floor corridor. Ayako was walking from the back. Lin-san was walking to the back. They nearly collided, quickly overlapped, and passed by each other.

“Huh...”

When I pointed, Naru nodded.

“Everyone is here. However, they’re not aware of each other’s existence.”

“I see...”

I was so happy, I wanted to cry. Everyone was fine. No one was missing.

“What should I do now?”

After I asked, he put a hand on my shoulder.

“It’s about time you learned to do it on your own.”

“Does that mean I shouldn’t ask?”

“No, that’s not it. —Have you calmed down yet?”

“...yeah.”

“This place is still safe for a little while. So don’t worry and try it again.”

“Again?”

Naru nodded.

“Right. Come out by yourself without being drawn out by me.”

...come out without being drawn out...

“Then, you’ve been making me dream this whole time?”

...is that possibly what he’s implying? Is that how it is?

Naru didn’t reply. His beautiful smile returned.

2

“After I send you back to your body, do it again by yourself.”

“...okay.”

“When you get back, become very tense and gather your body together.”

“Become tense?”

“Right. Focus on your whole body, and you should raise both hands. Cross your fingers in front of your chest.”

“Like this?”

When I tried it, he nodded.

“Yeah. Then, breathe slowly and count your breaths. One after the other, release the tension from your fingertips.”

“I don’t quite understand.”

“Focus on your whole body and breathe slowly. As you breathe, turn your consciousness to how you’re breathing. Inhale and exhale repeatedly three times, then, to start, release the tension from your fingers.”

“Three times, huh?”

“However many times you do it is fine. Every three times, gradually release the tension. After the fingers are the wrists, and after the wrists are the elbows. After you release the tension from your shoulders, release it from your legs this time. From the fingers is just like with the arms. Release it from each joint in turn. —Do you understand?”

“Yeah. I understand.”

“After the tension is released from your limbs, release it from your torso in order from your waist this time. Your posture will relax, but don’t worry. If you’re about to fall over, then you can fall over.”

“Okay.”

“Release the tension up to your neck and after it's released from your whole body, think about Kirishima. It only has to be a vague awareness. If you can't focus on him well, then recall the will-o'-the-wisps in the waiting room. It's also okay to recall the word 'Kirishima.'”

“...got it.”

“When it's time to wake up, remember your body. You have to do this in order to return safely.”

“Okay. I'll try. —But, how do I persuade him?”

Naru smiled elegantly.

“Imbue him with light.”

“Light?”

“Yeah. —Even I don't understand it well, but I feel that the idea that there's a heaven and there's a hell is correct in a sense. —A person is made up of 'body' and 'spirit'.”

“Yeah.”

“I think the 'spirit' is made up of two more things. These are 'soul' and 'ego'. There is the word 'will', but when you think about it, this is made up of 'desire' and 'aspiration'.”

“Hmm...”

“This 'ego' envelops the 'soul'. I think it's easy to understand by thinking about the 'ego' as a membrane and the 'soul' as water. The 'soul' is a shapeless substance and the 'ego' works to regulate its form. Since the membrane known as the 'ego' is transparent, the color of the water known as the 'soul', which is inside, can be seen through it. I think that the shape and color produced by the 'ego' and the 'soul' is the 'spirit'.”

“Really.”

“Furthermore, the 'soul' is made up of particles of 'feeling' just like water is made up of oxygen and hydrogen. There are positive and negative particles of

‘feeling’. The positive particles emit light, and the negative particles absorb light.”

“Does that mean the positive ‘feeling’ shines and the negative ‘feeling’ is dark?”

“Right. The positive ‘feeling’ is light and the negative ‘feeling’ is darkness. Through the actions of the ‘soul’, these two particles are constantly produced and emitted outside the membrane known as the ‘ego’. —Do you understand?”

“I feel like... I understand.”

“Since the positive particles are light, they steadily rise and since the negative particles are heavy, they sink. Then, the light and darkness gather together and produce large areas.”

“That’s heaven and hell, right?”

Naru nodded.

“When a person dies, he becomes only ‘spirit.’ At that time, if the ‘soul’ contains a lot of negative particles, the ‘spirit’ is heavy, so it will sink. Conversely, if it contains a lot of positive particles, it can ascend.”

“Both Kirishima-sensei and the children sank down because they had too many negative ‘feelings’, right?”

“Exactly. As the ‘spirit’ steadily sinks, since the positive ‘feelings’ are light, the effort to rise increases and they’re expelled outside the ‘spirit’. As a result, since it will become even heavier and sink, it becomes easier for even more positive particles to be expelled. By doing so... it will eventually become only negative particles.”

“Is that what an evil spirit is?”

“—Yeah.”

Saying that, Naru cast his eyes downward.

“...All of them didn’t want to die. So they’re unable to accept the fact that they died. They were scared and sad. And now they’re lonely and bitter. Like that, even if they remain in this world, they’re unable to be content at all. This world is not theirs anymore. The joy that was in this world can never be

obtained again.”

“...poor things...”

Naru made a slightly wistful smile.

“They’ve fully accumulated negative ‘feelings’ and are sinking to the dark bottom. Thus, the thing that’s necessary to save them is to imbue them with light. Imbue them with positive ‘feelings’. As a result, they’ll become lighter and be able to rise, and if they rise, it becomes easier to take in the positive ‘feelings’.”

“But...how?”

“First, you have to turn into light yourself, Mai.”

“Turn into light?”

“Right. The positive ‘feeling’ is a warm, gentle emotion. It can’t be pity. Even sympathy is bad. Feel genuinely gentle and then speak to them. Then the positive particles will be released along with your words.”

“It’s difficult, isn’t it?”

Naru smiled.

“It’s not difficult at all. You only have to remember a moment when you felt very genuinely gentle or a time when you had truly warm thoughts.”

...a warm, gentle memory...

“There are some people who don’t feel like that, but you’re different. — Right?”

“I wonder.”

“Some people sink to the negative area while alive. Actually, life and death aren’t related to the way the ‘spirit’ exists. However, the ‘ego’ of a living person is thick. Therefore, no matter how much they emit positive particles, it doesn’t quite reach the inside of another person. Because of this, it’s difficult for others to save living people.”

“...is the ‘ego’ of a deceased person thin?”

“Very thin. Believe in yourself. You’re absolutely capable.”

“...okay.”

Naru smiled and then gently pushed my shoulder. All of a sudden, Naru’s figure became distant.

Suddenly, I felt the sensation of returning to myself.

My cramped palms twitched.

Darkness spread out before my eyes. Only the front window was faintly bright.

I lifted my body, which had been leaning on the door.

“Naru...”

I somehow understood. If I was able to emerge from my body like that, then it wouldn’t be necessary for Naru to do it. It seemed Naru must have put me in a trance state in order to give me suggestions. Since we’re separated and he’s unable to do it, then...

Surely that’s it.

I’m not dreaming about Naru. I’m really meeting him.

—Ah, I think so.

Masako said that once. It was during that time when she was caught by the spirit. Naru was with her. Surely, Naru went to encourage her.

“...incredible. It’s unimaginable.”

For him to do such a thing...

But, the Naru I meet when I’m away from my body is very gentle. If it’s the ‘spirit’ that leaves the body and the ‘ego’ becomes thinner without the body, then doesn’t that mean it’s easier to see the truth of another person whose ‘spirit’ is away from the body? If so, it may be that kind of thing. He’s probably gentle to that extent deep inside....

“I...like Naru...”

3

As instructed, I gathered my body together. I focused on my entire body and breathed slowly.

Then, I released the tension in order. First, from the hands. Just as I released the tension from my elbows, my hands, which were folded in front of my chest, fell to my lap. Then, my legs. When I released the tension, my legs fell over sideways. I released the tension from my torso.

When the tension was released from my neck, my head hung down deeply. As I continued to breathe, I felt my body lightly drift upward.

—Then, there was a sudden impact.

“...!”

I was thrown sideways. My whole body was struck so hard that I could barely breathe and when I opened my eyes, the darkness was pitch-black. What happened? I wonder if I failed.

I surveyed the empty darkness. When the beating of my heart calmed slightly, a feeble voice sounded in my ears.

Opening my eyes wide, I listened carefully. As my eyes grew accustomed to the darkness, the surrounding scenery gradually became visible. Along with that, I realized the voice was the cry of many feeble voices.

I could see seats lined up in rows. It was the inside of a bus. It was bent here and there, the glass of the windows was completely broken, and it was leaning severely. The bus was filled with feeble screams and crying.

“...Mariko.”

Someone spoke. It was a man’s voice.

“Tsugumi. Takato.”

A man rose to his feet from below the front seat.

“Are you okay? Is everyone okay?”

He stood up and walked towards the back. He picked up a small girl from a seat close by.

“Ai, come on. Are you okay?”

His voice was pleading rather than asking. Within his words, I could hear the heartbreaking wish of him begging her to tell him she was okay.

The girl was exhausted and groaned weakly. His wish was not granted.

“...Mika...Masamii.”

Continuing to hold Ai-chan, he staggered towards the back. I could see the figures of children who had fallen down in both the aisle and seats. He continued to hold Ai-chan and kneeled down near Tsugumi-kun who had fallen into the aisle. Holding Ai-chan securely in one arm, he embraced Tsugumi-kun. After doing so, he looked around at the devastation surrounding him. Within the crushed and leaning bus, eighteen children were now crying out their final voice.

As he called out the children’s names, he gathered their small bodies. Though he tried to hold them all in his arms, it wasn’t possible for him to hug everyone close.

“...why...did this happen?”

Sobbing could be heard. I saw the man weeping for the first time.

“How could this happen?”

A weak voice called out, ‘Sensei.’

“...it hurts...”

“Sensei...”

The area overflowed with the painful cries of the children. After looking around at this, he fell down on the spot and wept bitterly.

“Sensei, I’m scared.”

Mariko-chan pulled at Sensei's clothing as she cried. Small hands extended one after the other, seeking his help.

"It hurts, Sensei."

"I'm scared."

He looked around at the children who gathered around him. One by one, he patted the hands that clung to him.

"It's okay... it's okay."

"Sensei..."

"Don't worry. Let's go back to the school. We'll go back and treat it, then you won't have anything to worry about."

"But, it hurts. I can't move."

"Don't worry. Sensei's going to bring everyone back. So, let's go back."

Though he was crying, he smiled at the children nevertheless.

My vision blurred. When I blinked, my tears spilled over and, once my vision was clear once more, I could see his figure leading the children by their hands towards a dark hole, which had opened at the back of the bus.

4

“...wait.”

I called out without thinking.

“Please wait, Kirishima-sensei!”

He looked back.

“It’s no use. Don’t do that.”

He walked towards me in the dark passage. A shadow fell over his face and his expression appeared somewhat cruel. I never would have guessed that he was a gentle teacher until just a moment ago.

“...don’t take them there. Both you and the children are dead.”

He came close to me.

“Please understand. All of you are already dead. Even if you take them there, it will only be painful, you won’t find comfort. They can’t go home and they won’t be able to see their mothers. Only pain remains and it won’t get any better...!”

His hands reached out and caught ahold of my shoulders. He grasped both my shoulders with such force that my bones cracked, then he turned me sideways with all his might.

“Sensei!”

I was forced to turn sideways, and then there was a classroom before me.

I stood in front of the classroom’s blackboard. There were eighteen desks in the classroom and the children were seated at them.

“I’m going to introduce a transfer student.”

As Sensei said this, I looked back at him. A bright, warm smile appeared on his

face.

“This is Taniyama Mai-san. Everyone, get along well!”

‘Yes!’ they all replied in unison, then laughed.

“Taniyama-san’s seat is right there. Saori, please look after her.”

‘Yes!’ answered the oldest girl. Sensei nudged my back and I was pushed into the classroom. All the children appeared extremely happy.

“Taniyama-san is much older than everyone, so if you have any troubles, please speak with her. —Taniyama-san also, please take care of everyone.”

I sat in a small chair. Saori-chan grinned beside me.

“...Sensei, this is no use. Something like this, don’t...”

I looked up at a small girl standing beside Kirishima-sensei.

“Sensei, there’s exactly forty people here, right?”

Sensei patted the girl’s head.

“Excellent! You were able to count it properly.”

“Yeah!”

‘Sensei,’ one of the other children called out to Kirishima-sensei.

“If we get anymore, can we have another class?”

“That’s right! We can divide it into two groups soon.”

“Then we can play dodgeball between the classes, right?”

“That’s right!”

“But, what about the teacher? If we have two classes and one teacher, it will be strange.”

“It’s okay.”

Sensei smiled.

“Because there are people who can become teachers.”

“Really?”

“Really. Soon, the teachers will increase. Then we’ll have to make a staff room.”

“Awesome! Wouldn’t it be nice if the school got full soon, Sensei?”

“It would!”

I watched the conversation between Sensei and the students with sadness.

...the sudden tragedy. The lonely school that sad hearts created. Since the school was lonely, it would be good if it became filled with students and because there were no longer any new students, it would at the very least be filled with transfer students. The children were sad and alone, hungry and thirsty. Because I understood these feelings, it was so painful I wanted to cry.

“Kirishima-sensei, please stop this!”

Sensei looked over at me with puzzlement.

“Please stop this already. Even if the school building fills up, the loneliness will never end. The reason everyone’s lonely isn’t because there aren’t enough students. It’s because they’re no longer living.”

“...what are you talking about?”

Sensei smiled. His eyes took on a disquieting hue.

“Everyone is already dead. The bus was in an accident on the way back from the field trip and everyone died. Even if you pretend to forget, everyone remembers. So it will always be painful. No matter how much you increase your friends, no matter how lively the school becomes, it can’t heal the loneliness of not being able to live anymore.”

“What are you talking about?”

“I understand Sensei’s feelings. The sudden death of these small children. Even though their future and dreams should have existed, they were all cut off. They were scared, in pain, dying. I can understand your feelings for wanting to do this, but as long as you do this, it will continue to be painful. Even for the transfer students you bring in, it will be just as painful.”

“Taniyama-san, you’re a bit of a strange child, aren’t you?”

“Please stop this already! Everyone, remember!”

I looked around at all the children, who were staring at me. The students had increased to thirty-nine without me noticing.

“There was a terrible accident. Because of this, everyone died.”

Suddenly, a boy in a seat at the front burst into tears. Then, as if contagious, the other children began to cry as well.

“You’re in pain, right? You’re sad, right? But, the transfer students you took are in pain, too. In order to not be in pain, you have to go to the other side of the bridge. If you [cross the river](#), all the pain and suffering will disappear. Even if you increase your friends, the pain will not go away.”

The inside of the classroom was filled with weeping and voices calling out, ‘It hurts!’ I felt like a bully, but I had to do this in order to alleviate everyone’s pain.

“Is there anyone who’s gone home? Anyone who’s seen their mother and father?”

My arm was grabbed with an intense force.

“You’re a cruel child.”

“It isn’t cruel.”

“It is cruel. Everyone’s crying so much. Don’t you think it’s pitiful!?”

“I think it’s pitiful to forever remain this way without change!”

Even if they want to go home, they can’t go home. Even if they want to see someone, they can’t see that person. It’s because they’re dead. All these children are dead. Therefore, they can’t go home no matter how much they wish to. They can’t see their mother and father.

“My mother and father also died. I’d be very sad if they were trapped somewhere like this. I don’t mind if they forget about me because I want them to cross over the bridge quickly and be at ease. Therefore, I want everyone to be at ease, too.”

The room was filled with crying. See, they could not forget. Like this, it would always be painful.

“It’s a lie!”

Kirishima-sensei loudly raised his voice.

“It’s a lie that we’re died! Don’t believe it!”

“Sensei, stop it!”

Suddenly, something flew at me. I felt it cut my body. There weren’t any injuries, but there was a piercing pain that made my whole body numb.

“Sensei, please understand!”

“Shut up! The students and I are fine like this!!”

Something came flying at me with great force. I was nearly sent flying. I was forced out into the corridor and the moment I hit the wall, I heard Naru’s voice.

“Mai!! Come back!!”

—Go back? Go back where?

“Remember your body!”

**Chapter 9: August 14th, 12 midnight – 1:00
am**

1

I abruptly returned to myself and woke up.

A deep darkness lay before my eyes. I was leaning against the door, nearly lying down.

“A failure...”

I failed.

—He’s obstinate.

I don’t think there are any words that can persuade someone who’s become so obstinate.

“...Kirishima...sensei.”

I understand his pain. I understand, but I cannot leave this as it is.

As it is, the children are miserable. They’re filled with the sorrow of death and wholly paralyzed. Because they’re lonely, they’re starving for something to fill that loneliness, calling out for companions, but it doesn’t console them in the least. Their sorrow steadily grows once they’ve obtained one.

I will purify those children and ensure one never dies here again. I have to stop the loneliness.

And Kirishima-sensei.

He lost his life, and to make matters worse, he grieved the loss of his student’s lives. In an effort to erase it all, he became an obstinate person.

I understand his feelings, but I think he’s a very gentle person.

Even so, I want to look after my companions just like he wanted to look after his students. I want us all to meet safely, leave this school together, and say, “See you later.”

Consequently, I remembered Naru's words.

"Oh, I see now..."

How stupid of me!

"I was told I shouldn't show them pity or sympathy."

I smacked my head.

It was pointless even if I scolded myself. I needed to imbue them with light.

"Alright!"

Murmuring to myself, I stood up energetically.

"I'll try it again."

I opened the classroom door. Somehow, I felt it would be pointless no matter how much I called out from here.

—I'll go to the classroom.

The place that Kirishima-sensei and the children are particular about. Because, undoubtedly, that place will be at least a little warmer for both the children and Sensei.

Within the darkness, as I walked towards the stairs, feeling my way along the wall with my hand, there was a slight clatter. When I stopped for a moment, the sound grew closer from in front of me.

As I remained still, a small, black shadow appeared alongside the wall. My pulse elevated slightly.

Three shadows appeared at the corner. They were about the size of children, but their silhouettes appeared distorted in some respects. They had small heads and limbs like sticks. Their chests and shoulders were also tremendously small, however, their stomachs were large to the extent of oddity. Their manner of walking with both hands was bizarre.

—'It's dangerous,' passed through my mind.

I wonder, is wariness a positive 'feeling' or a negative 'feeling'?

I took a deep breath.

“...Hey, let’s go to the classroom.”

The approaching shadows momentarily stopped.

“Well, shall we go back to the classroom?”

I crouched down.

I mustn’t think of them as monsters. Those in front of me now are children. If a person is made of ‘body’ and ‘spirit’, then these children have no body.

—I love children.

Children are small and soft, and of course they’re brazenly mouthy and say spiteful things, but even so, they possess an atmosphere that makes it unable to resist hugging them.

I remembered that, after I started worked at ‘Shibuya Psychic Research’, I met a variety of children while going on investigations. I smiled lightly.

There were three small children in the house in Noto where we had been until now. We became good friends while our stay there dragged on. When it was time to go home, I was happy that they told me, “Please come again,” with tearful expressions. I wonder what everyone is doing now. —Well, naturally, they’re probably sleeping right now.

A genuine smile escaped.

“Well, would you like to go to the classroom? Shall we go together?”

The children tilted their heads a little. It was a truly endearing, child-like gesture.

“I’d like to see everyone in class and Kirishima-sensei. I want to say I’m sorry for being mean earlier... oh, was that a dream or reality?”

Like before, the children continued to tilt their heads, unmoving.

“I don’t really know. —Still, I feel that I need to say sorry. So, shall we go to the classroom? Will you take me?”

The children looked at each other once again, then moved awkwardly and turned their backs. Taking a few steps, they began walking towards the stairs.

“...thank you.”

After we went to the stairs, I saw some children at the bottom of the staircase. I walked without worrying and descended the stairs. None of them were a danger to me. I was gladdened by this and my mood steadily brightened.

—Well, such simplicity is necessary.

There were also two or so children in the entry hall and, as I smiled at them and walked towards the classroom, they toddled after me. Ten or so children followed around me and it was something enjoyable. Before long, the smallest child beside me raised her thin, fragile hand and I took ahold of it.

As soon as I grasped the small hand, which felt like a withered branch, my chest swelled with affection.

2

When I entered the classroom, there were a great deal of children inside. Children were seated at the desks, children gathered at the back of the classroom, children walked between the desks. They were doing a variety of things. It was as though I had really entered a classroom at recess.

There was a large shadow seated at the desk adjacent to the teaching podium. It was about the size of an adult and resembled a demon without horns. Sensei stood up. He remained standing, silently watching me.

“I’m sorry about earlier.”

I lightly bowed my head to Sensei, then also bowed my head to the children who were looking in my direction.

“I’m sorry.”

Saying that, I looked around the classroom.

“I’m sorry that I spoke cruelly. But, I’ll say the same thing. Please don’t increase your friends anymore.”

Sensei took a step. I looked at him directly.

“Please return my companions.”

He took another step, the distance between us drawing nearer.

“Just like Sensei cares for everyone, my companions are important to me, too.”

Saying that, I looked around the classroom.

“Just like everyone loves Sensei and their friends, I really love my companions, too.”

Naru and Lin-san. Ayako and Masako. Bou-san, John, and Yasuhara-san.

Ever since we met by chance up until today, there have been things that were warm and gentle.

“Naru seems like an extremely cold-hearted person, but actually, there’s a part of him that’s surprisingly gentle. He’s good at magic tricks. There was a time before when he gave me encouragement me with that.”

All of a sudden, there was a noise and light illuminated the inside of the classroom. It was merely the clouds drifting apart and the moonlight shining in, but in a way, I felt greatly encouraged.

“Lin-san, too. Though he’s extremely expressionless, reticent, and difficult to approach, I think he’s actually a gentle person nonetheless. Also, because he’s such a person, when I receive a smile from him every once in a while, I feel like I’ve earned something. I feel like it’s a very good sign and it makes me happy.”

Although, he’s only given me enough smiles to count on one hand.

“If I’m speaking of those who put people off at first, then it’s certainly true of Masako, too. She seems stuck-up, but she’s a reliable gal. She’s clever, too. Actually, she’s quite admirable, and since I’m a rough person, I think her girlish nature is nice. Therefore, I’m extremely glad that Masako and I became good friends. —Yeah, Bou-san and Ayako’s first impression was bad, too. Still, everyone’s pretty nice.”

Actually, when I think about it, all of them have poor demeanors.

“Ayako is actually a really caring person. She’s noisy, though. In fact, she always fusses over me. I like it. It reminds me of my mother and makes me happy.”

Although, my mother was a bit quieter.

“Whenever I talk to Ayako, it cheers me up. That’s why I love her. I’m glad that I get lectured by Bou-san like I’m being scolded by a father. I really like it when he pushes me around with his big hands and pats my head. But it’s a secret, okay?”

If it got out, that guy would forever be emboldened by it.

“I love John’s slightly weird Kansai accent. He’s quiet and humble to the

utmost. And yet, when a thought occurs to me and I look back at him, I realize he's watching over me with kind eyes. That happens often and it's wonderful. I also love Yasuhara-san's immense cheerfulness. When I'm with him, I feel uplifted. No matter how serious a situation, when I hear Yasuhara-san's jokes or his and Bou-san's comic dialogue, it makes me feel like we'll be able to manage one way or another."

—Yeah, I really love them all.

"Therefore, I want you to return them. Because they're all important to me. I love being with all of them. I want to leave the school building with them and return to Tokyo together. The office will be gone, but that doesn't necessarily mean we'll never see each other again."

Saying this, I smiled slightly in embarrassment.

"...Yeah, I thought we might not meet again, but I felt like I'd be laughed at if I said, 'Let's get together even if the office closes.' But I know that's unlikely."

I'm pretty stupid.

"After all, everyone's kind to me. Even while I'm here, everyone is protecting me. To refuse to meet like that, I think it would have to be because it's someone you dislike enough to not want to meet again or because it's someone you don't care about enough for it to matter that you meet again. I'm determined right now because everyone is important to me. And it's a little conceited, but they protect me with all their might because they care about me."

Kirishima-sensei was watching me.

The children filling the classroom were also watching me.

"Therefore, return everyone. Then, I want you to stop bringing more friends."

My hand was lightly tugged and I remembered I was still holding the small child's hand. The light of the moon was bright in my eyes, which had gotten used to the darkness, and I could clearly see that the child's form was not human.

The imp that held my hand was staring up at me. I gave her a small smile.

“I think there are people who treasure and worry for the friends you brought here just like I treasure and worry for all my companions. Like me, I think there are people that they love. Not being able to see the people you love is painful. If my loved ones disappeared, I would be sad. I think that’s the same for everyone, too.”

3

“The same?”

The child holding my hand was the one who spoke.

“Yeah. —What’s your name?”

“Sugiura Ayano.”

Ayano-chan’s back straightened and before I knew it, she was standing upright. The hand I was holding, which had been so slender, thickened and felt slightly soft.

“Ayano-chan, you love your father, right?”

“I love him.”

“You love your mother, too, right?”

“Yeah!”

“I love my companions, too. It’s the same as Ayano-chan.”

“It is the same, huh?”

“Yeah. You love Sensei, too, right?”

“I really love him!”

I laughed.

“Because he’s a very gentle and good teacher, right?”

“Yeah!”

The face of a ten-year-old girl overlapped her nodding face.

“But it’s scary when he gets angry.”

“Ah, I see!”

“He’s really good at the horizontal bars.”

“Really.”

“But, he’s a little tone deaf.”

I laughed and looked at everyone in the classroom.

“Does everyone love Sensei, too?”

When I asked, their voices returned, ‘I love him!’

“If Sensei disappeared, it’d be lonely, right? You wouldn’t like it, right?”

They nodded their small faces.

“In that same way, all the transfer students had someone who became lonely.”

A hush fell over the class.

“Because you were all lonely, you brought children to play. But, just like you, the children had a teacher that they loved....therefore, don’t do it anymore.”

The children were all seated. The classroom was flooded with moonlight.

“I have no mother and father, but I’m not lonely because I have my companions. Will everyone be sad if you only have one classroom despite having Sensei and your friends?”

“Not at all!”

I heard a voice from behind me and when I looked back, it was Tsugumi-kun.

I patted Tsugumi-kun’s head.

“Well done! That a boy!”

“Yeah!”

I smiled at Tsugumi-kun, then looked at Kirishima-sensei. He no longer looked like a demon. The man hung his head and cast his eyes downward.

“Everyone loves Sensei tremendously.”

“.....”

“I think it’s really nice that there are teachers who love their students and students who love their teacher.”

“...Is that so?”

“Yes.”

Sensei remained silent for a long while. Eventually, he spoke absently, “It’s possible that I might be a very lucky person... ”

“...Yes.”

It was as I nodded. A light shone from behind. When I looked back, a bright light was shining through the gaps in the classroom door directly behind me. When I opened the door, it was midday outside.

Although it was dark inside here until just now, it didn’t seem blinding in the slightest. Just outside the door was a meadow rather than a corridor. Beautiful, soft green grass went on forever and the area was drenched in a downpour of brilliant light.

‘Wow...’ the children softly exclaimed.

Sensei looked outside in awe, then looked around the inside of the classroom.

“—Everyone, should we go on another field trip?”

There was a small shout of joy.

“Are we going on the bus?”

It was Mariko-chan who asked so uneasily.

“No, we won’t use the bus. We’re all going to walk there.”

“That’s a relief, then, Sensei.”

“Yeah. It’ll be okay.”

Smiling, Kirishima-sensei walked towards the door. I stepped aside just a bit and vacated the space. Sensei stood beside the door.

“Let’s go! —The smaller children should hold hands with their upperclassmen. Watch your step and don’t fall behind!”

‘Okay!’ they responded cheerfully.

Then, the children left the classroom one after another. Some of the children ran out by themselves and others grabbed the hands of the smaller children.

Sensei watched over them, and then he held out his hand toward Ayano-chan, who had held onto my hand and didn't let go until the end.

"Ayano, too. Let's go."

"Okay."

Ayano-chan released my hand and took ahold of Sensei's. She looked back and waved her tiny hand.

"Bye-bye, Onee-chan!"

"Bye-bye!"

Kirishima-sensei bowed his head slightly. Immediately after, he tugged on Ayano-chan's hand and exited the classroom. The door closed. —Then I was left behind inside the classroom.

Dust had accumulated on the floor and covered the desks and chairs. That was all that remained within the classroom. The deserted space was fully saturated in the pale light of the moon.

I cried a little just then, but it definitely wasn't because I was in pain.

4

I went out into the corridor and stopped for a moment. I stared at the closed window.

When I gently reached out my hand and tried to move it, it creaked, but opened a little regardless. The gentle night breeze drifted in. I was greeted by the smell of wet grass.

I smiled complacently and this time opened the window with all my might. The old, hard to open window got caught, but opened wide nonetheless.

“Hehehe...”

The school yard was also drenched in a downpour of moonlight and was very bright.

I climbed out onto the window frame.

“Aiiee!”

I shouted and jumped off into the school yard.

I landed somehow and immediately started running. I ran through the wet grass, then looked back.

My eyes swept over the entirety of the wooden schoolhouse.

The tiled roof appeared silver in the moonlight. The windows looked like black holes and the walls were gray. A pleasant breeze was blowing. There was the high-pitched hum of insects.

“Oi!”

At the same time as the voice cried out, the second floor window loudly shattered and fell.

“Ehh?”

Accompanying the wild shout, Bou-san's figure appeared from the window frame.

"Bou-san!"

As I waved my hand, something troubling occurred to me.

—Would he do that?

"What's up?"

"I'm thinking about the problem of age and method."

Bou-san's voice carried a long way.

"What's that?"

"Oh well, nevermind."

As soon as I said this, he lightly climbed over the window frame. Of course, before I could tell him it wasn't something an old man should do, he jumped from the second floor window. Certainly, it was the proper execution for the method, but he lost points for staggering upon landing.

"My, you're still young, aren't you?"

When I heard this and looked, Yasuhara-san's face appeared from a window at the end of the second floor.

Bou-san looked back at the school building.

"Yo, why don't you show me the skills of a true young man?"

"Eeh? You expect me to jump down, too?"

"You're young, aren't you?"

"Will you catch me?"

"I refuse."

"What kind of shameful things are you doing?"

Ayako called this out as her face appeared from a window on the first floor.

"Yay! Ayako! Long time no see!"

"It really was a long time, huh? I was wondering where you disappeared to."

I laughed.

“I didn’t disappear. You’re the one who was gone, Ayako!”

“Don’t quibble!”

“Ahahaha!”

It’s the truth, though!

The door to the entry hall opened. Naru was the first to come out from there. When I waved, he looked away in seeming indifference. —Tch.

Following him out was Lin-san’s tall figure.

“Lin-san, you too, long time no see!”

When I called out, he stopped as if a little startled, then nodded to me. Next, Masako came out with quick little steps.

“Mai!”

“Yoo-hoo, Masako! How have you been?”

“What in the world happened? It’s you who I should be asking—”

Masako started to say this, then stopped walking. It seemed like she was going to come running over here, but she changed direction and rushed over to Naru. Such is why a woman’s friendship is fragile.

“Mai-san, were you alright?”

Saying that, John jumped down from a first floor window and actually rushed over to me.

John is truly kind. *tears*

“Yeah. I’m okay.”

“I’m glad. —Everyone, too.”

I looked around at the figures coming over in small groups.

Ayako and Yasuhara-san, who had given up on jumping out the window, came out from the entry hall.

—With that, everyone was together.

“So then? Who did it?”

Everyone tilted their heads at Bou-san’s words.

Hehehe. Only I know that.

“Seeing that you asked that, I guess it wasn’t you, Takigawa-san.”

Bou-san choked at Yasuhara-san’s words.

“It definitely wasn’t you, Shōnen.”

“If I did it, wouldn’t that cause everyone to lose face?”

“Yeah, that’s true.”

“It couldn’t possible have been... Shibuya-san. Seeing as he’s walking and standing all right like this.”

Naru lightly shrugged his shoulders.

“I would confess, however it was not me, either.”

This was said by Masako.

“I do not think it was Lin-san or Brown-san, either. It was a purification rather than an exorcism. Since I saw the light of purification.”

John nodded.

“Indeed. I couldn’t do anything.”

Then, everyone’s gaze turned to Ayako.

Of course, I’m a good-for-nothing...*mumble mumble*

“Me!?”

After opening her eyes wide, Ayako pointed at herself.

“Tch, no! There aren’t any trees I can rely on in this area.”

There was a momentary pause. Then, glances were exchanged.

Hey, why are you ignoring me?

“...there’s only one person left.”

This was said by Yasuhara-san.

“No way! I vote that they purified themselves.”

Ayako was the one who said this hateful thing.

“Well, are we going back?”

So cruel! *sob* Even Bou-san!

Then, while walking in the direction of the car, Bou-san ruffled my hair. Ayako and Masako also patted my back. Next were John and Yasuhara-san’s smiling faces and Lin-san’s auspicious smile. And then Naru spoke a single phrase.

“...Thanks for the hard work.”

—Well, whatever.

Chapter 10: August 14, 1:00 pm - 3:00 pm

1

“Get up already!”

When I was awakened by Ayako’s scornful tone, the inside of the bungalow was shockingly bright.

“Morning...”

I’m sleepy. It’s too bright.

When I buried my face in the futon, a fist came flying at my head.

“I said get up!”

“Okay...”

As I was muttering, the ground suddenly shook and I was thrown out. —To be exact, the mattress was pulled from beneath my body and I rolled off onto the tatami mats.

“Ouch...”

I opened my eyes. In the corner of the room a ready meal had been arranged. I clung to my thin summer futon while wearing only my pajamas.

“Ah, the meal is ready. I’m hungry.”

“Hey, get yourself together! You’re indecent for a young woman!”

Shut up. I’m sleepy, so I don’t care about that kind of thing.

In a sleepy state, I vacantly looked around the inside of the room, then jumped up.

“...!”

The majority of our group was staring at me with shocked expressions.

—Crap!!

Of course. Only Bou-san would do something like tear away your futon. Both John and Yasuhara-san had slightly embarrassed smiles and were blushing a little.

I was sleeping like a log in front of the boys, wasn't I? See, even if I put on airs now, my true character has most likely been exposed. But isn't this the worst?

"Aaah, morning!"

With great haste, I washed my face, changed my clothes next door (clearly, since there was a large audience, I couldn't change in that place), and returned to eat our meal.

"Let's eat!"

Ayako's cooking is very good. Her surprisingly good rustic cuisine doesn't match her garish appearance. Humans are a mystery, aren't they?

"Time to eat."

"You haven't eaten since yesterday morning. I'm sure you're probably starving."

"Will you stop talking like I'm a glutton?"

"Am I wrong?"

...you're not wrong.

We came back late last night. Regardless, I took a bath and fell asleep shortly after I dried my hair.

"What time did everyone get up?"

"In truth, a great deal earlier than you."

...I'm very sorry about that.

"We went to the town hall and met the village chief, then we went shopping and made food."

"Thanks for the hard work."

"At least look a little sorry!"

Right, right. Thank you for letting me sleep.

2

“Well? In the end, how was the aftermath dealt with?”

“The blame was taken by the assistant.”

When Bou-san said this, I looked into his face.

“Blame?”

“After all this time, they don’t want to get in trouble with the police or anything, right? At the same time, it’s impossible for them to feign ignorance after corpses are found strewn about.”

Certainly.

“And it seems he discovered it. Afterward, those guys probably went about it in their own way without telling anyone.”

“I see. ...Well, you reap what you sow.”

“That’s right.”

...Speaking of corpses.

“Hey, what’s happening with the effort at the dam?”

I hate myself for eating a meal while asking that.

“It’s currently in progress. Also, it seems it was postponed yesterday due to the rain.”

“Hmm...”

It must be tough...

“How can you eat while talking about such a thing?”

Ayako appeared disgusted.

“Give me a break. Ayako, you’re pretending to be delicate.”

“Unlike you, I actually am delicate.”

“Tchhh. It can’t be avoided. It’s the same for spiritualists as it is for monks.”

“What’s that?”

“If people don’t die, you’re useless.”

A few people burst into laughter.

“That’s true.”

“The job of a monk isn’t only funerals, young lady.”

Because of Bou-san’s frown, I asked, “Is there something else beside funerals and memorial services?”

“We also do wedding ceremonies.”

“That’s a lie.”

“Simpleton. More or less, that’s what you call a marriage before Buddha.”

“Really?”

“At a proper temple, taking a vow and exchanging prayer beads before Buddha.”

“That’s not really romantic, is it.”

“Well, this won’t be done unless it’s a child of the temple.”

I see. I don’t think girls will yearn for that.

“Hey, it’s okay. Because you can wash your hands of all this.”

Being said by Ayako, my shoulders fell a bit.

“That’s right. When the office closes, I won’t have to go on investigations anymore.”

At great pains, it finally became possible for me to cleanse spirits. Well, that doesn’t necessarily mean I want to continue doing such a thing.

“After the office is closed, I’ll have a lot of free time.”

It was John who told me this.

“...Yeah. I’ve been going to the office for a while, so I’ll have trouble figuring

out how to use my time.”

It’s possible I’ll also have trouble with money. How did I support myself before working part-time?

“Then, why don’t you come to Sunday school sometime soon?”

I looked at him blankly.

“Sunday school? Is that when you gather the children and study the Bible in church?”

“Yes, it is. I usually look after them. It’s fun with all the rambunctious children. Mai-san, do you not like children?”

“I like playing with children. But I’ve never read the Bible...”

John smiled elegantly.

“Actually, it’s mostly playing with children. If you don’t mind, please come visit sometime.”

Sunday school? I wonder what it’s like.

As I was thinking about this, Bou-san chuckled.

“What?”

“Well, I can imagine what it’s like.”

“What it’s like?”

“John, the male nanny.”

There was a roar of laughter inside the building.

No way, it’s true! He would definitely be like a male nanny. John, playing with the children and wearing a troubled expression, but laughing nevertheless.

“Is Sunday school great?”

“Yes. Takigawa-san, too, please come if you like.”

“I think I will go. It would be nostalgic.”

I blinked in surprise.

“Nostalgic?”

“Right. I used to go often when I was little.”

“...Wait a minute.”

“Oh?”

“Bou-san, isn't your home a temple?”

“It is a temple. Isn't it okay even if the child of a monk goes? When I went to Sunday school, there were picture-card shows of Biblical stories and I was given sweets.”

...was that your aim, you corrupt monk? Honestly, this old man.

3

Having finished the meal, we chased the three men out and tidied up.

“I wonder if anyone will hire me to work part-time.”

When I said this, Ayako, who was drying the cups, gave a wry smile.

“I could hire you, but I can’t pay you a part-time wage as much as ‘Shibuya Psychic Research.’”

Ah. I see. I can understand that.

“It was exceptionally good. —Do you make a living as a spiritualist alone, Ayako?”

“More or less. If it’s not enough, my parents give me money.”

“I see. You’re a rich person. There’s no need for you to try to marry into money.”

Ayako gave a brief laugh.

“Greatness is comparative. Even though my family has a villa, there’s no yacht. Hohoho.”

“Extravagant person.”

“I’m an extravagant woman. Unlike you.”

“Nya!”

“Ho-hohohoho!”

“Aren’t you an only child? Does your family not have a successor?”

“I wish my parents would adopt a rich doctor as a son-in-law who’s a good-looking and well-rounded person.”

I looked at Ayako incredulously.

“You really are an extravagant person.”

“Japan is a country where there’s a gap between the rich and poor. Don’t you know that?”

“I know it now. —Masako, what about you? Do you have any siblings?”

Masako, who was putting away the cups, blinked her eyes.

“I have none. What are you up to?”

“Investigating personal histories. After thinking about it carefully, I don’t know anything about you guys.”

“Is that so...”

“It is. After the office is closed, it’s possible I won’t see everyone again. Therefore, I thought I should ask before it’s too late.”

“We cannot meet if the office is closed? Why is that?”

“Isn’t that so?”

“I wonder if it is.”

I sighed.

“I don’t know your house or telephone number, Masako.”

“I don’t know your contact information, either, Mai.”

“Yeah. That’s right.”

“But you’ll know it if you ask, right?”

“If I ask, will you tell me?”

Masako sighed. A moment later, she abruptly turned her back on me and went back to the room.

“Mai-chan will be lonely, huh?”

Ayako laughed.

“Yeah. I’ll be lonely. I’ve gotten used to being bullied by everyone and if I don’t get bullied, my body will feel like there’s something missing.”

“What have you mistaken for bullying? If I win the heart of a son from a

distinguished family of some kind of large business and get married, I may take you along as a lady-in-waiting.”

“You won’t have a single boyfriend due to an overambitious aim like that.”

“Shut up!”

Ultimately, it might be classified as a business association.

Sighing deeply, I failed to notice the sound of Masako’s footsteps as she returned.

“Mai.”

“Huh?”

Masako grabbed my hand.

“Masako?”

“...”

“J-Just a minute! What are you doing?”

“...”

“Hey! Just a minute, hold on!”

“Here you are.”

Masako held up a magic marker and grinned. Ayako burst out laughing.

“...what were you thinking, Masako?”

“My address and phone number.”

“Do you usually write it on other people’s arms?”

“Oh, you would have preferred it if I wrote it on your shirt, I wonder?”

“I say!”

I looked at my arm incredulously. With such large characters... Oh!

“Put out your hand!”

“I refuse.”

“Then I’ll write on your kimono.”

“I refuse that, too.”

This girl really doesn't have a good personality.

“Alright, alright. I get it.”

“There's notepaper in the room, you know.”

“...”

“You're embarrassed to exchange addresses formally, aren't you?”

Yup. I understand perfectly why Masako would write on a person's arm. She's fiercely embarrassed to write it on notepaper and say something like, 'Keep in touch!' This isn't limited to Masako, either. Such is the kind of embarrassed relationship we have.

“Surely everyone thinks so, too!”

“Is that so?”

“At least, I did. Even though I thought about sending out New Year's cards, I was embarrassed to ask for addresses, so I gave up.”

Ah, indeed. There's the custom of New Year's cards.

“John said so, too.”

Ayako told us.

“Really?”

“He said he thought about sending out cards at Christmas, but felt it was kind of strange to ask for addresses after all this time.”

Well, that's true. I guess.

“It's a strange relationship.”

“It is, huh?”

“That's right.”

4

I was distressed.

While I was at the office, there were people I met as matter of course.

I loved all of them. To refer to them as friends was strange, however, I undoubtedly thought of them as siblings or relatives. I thought it would continue in this way for a long time.

—However, there are no relationships that are without goodbyes.

If I'm reluctant to say goodbye, then it would be best to express that sentiment. Because even if I get rejected, it's not like I'll die. I should appeal to them by saying that I don't want to part ways. Then, what the other person does is another matter for that person.

That's why I used a lot of notepaper this afternoon. I made calling cards with a variety of colored markers. To hide my embarrassment, I made them as vibrant as I possibly could. Occasionally, I drew comics that said, 'Keep in touch,' and put things like hearts all over the place. *giggle* When I handed them out during tea time at three o'clock, everyone was shocked and laughed.

"Wow, Taniyama-san, you really are a high school girl."

"It's colorful and beautiful, Mai-san."

"This old man is dizzy."

"I'm questioning your aesthetic sense."

"You have become desperate, haven't you?"

Say whatever you like. I want to be contacted even if we cut ties.

"Still, this is a good idea. —Is there notepaper?"

Yasuhara-san said, then rummaged around and made an impromptu calling card.

‘A cheerful telephone-boy will be waiting for you anytime.’

This was written on the calling card I recieved and I laughed really hard.

“Hey you, it’s not a [chat line](#), you know.”

“There’s someone on each end of the telephone box, isn’t there...”

“He’s certainly cheerful.”

“He is, isn’t he?”

It was just like Yasuhara-san.

In the end, everyone told me their contact information and I felt very happy. Now, after the office closes, there’s no reason we can’t see each other again.

—Excluding a certain two people.

“If I gave these to Naru and Lin-san, it’d be hilarious.”

When I said this to no one in particular, a small silence descended.

I can imagine their reactions. One: Look astonished. Two: Say, ‘What are you thinking?’ Three: Dismiss it then and there.

“It’s because those two are insensitive.”

Ayako was the one who said this with a mingled sigh.

“We’re probably outside their consideration. Not that I even think I’d want to see them enough to keep in touch.”

“Really?”

If you can’t be honest, you’ll regret it.

“Oh, so you’re saying you’ll particularly want to see them?”

“Of course. I like both Naru and Lin-san to the extent that I’d want to contact them even if we cut ties.”

—Even though I say this, it’s not my honest opinion.

Though I thought so, Ayako stared at me in amazement.

“...What’s come over you? You’re being honest.”

“Yeah. I like them enough to be worried about them being sick and I like them

enough to get annoyed when they have secrets.”

...I’m not being honest at all.

“Given that we’re outside their consideration, they won’t even think of us anymore. Since I like the pair tremendously, that means my feelings will be unrequited.”

“That’s an extremely futile unrequited love.”

“I agree. Still, even if I’m sad about unrequited love and say ‘I don’t like you two,’ it’s completely pointless. Even if I say such a thing, because I’m outside their consideration, they probably won’t even be hurt. After all, the moment they go off somewhere, they’ll forget about it.”

“That’s...true.”

“It’s incredibly pathetic and unattractive to be enamored of someone and say, ‘I hate you,’ out of spite that your feelings aren’t reciprocated. Without mutual love, the regard of another person isn’t appreciated. Instead, it’s desperate and tacky.”

Ayako looked the other way in slight embarrassment.

“You’ve sure grown up.”

Bou-san patted my head.

“...Well, humans are growing creatures. But they also regress.”

“That’s the fun of being human. I like your positive attitude, Mai-chan.”

“Me, too. I like you, Bou-san.”

Hug! *snuggle*

“You shameful lot...”

“Aw, Ayako is jealous. We’ll include you. Come here.”

“No way!”

“You’re not being honest! Still, I like you, Ayako. Including that dishonest side.”

“Me, too!”

“Stop it!”

“I like you!”

“Same!”

“Stop it!”

“Aw, you’re blushing!”

“Oh, my! She’s bashful, huh?”

“Yeah.”

“You two!!!”

In the middle of that ruckus, Masako cried out, ‘Ah!’ Yasuhara-san stood up.

“Shibuya-san.”

Just as Yasuhara-san swiftly opened the screen door, Naru and Lin-san passed in front of the patio. The bungalow that they were using was a little back from ours, so if they tried to go to the water’s edge, they would end up passing by here.

“...Perfect. Are you in a hurry?”

Naru appeared slightly dubious.

“I’m not in a hurry, but that doesn’t mean I have time to spare.”

“I have a few questions I want to ask. Could you spare some time for me?”

“...Right now?”

“I would prefer right now.”

..questions he wants to ask?

“Ask.”

“Then, please come inside.”

“Can’t you do it here?”

“The questions are a bit complicated. I’m very sorry. —I also have something I’d like to ask Lin-san, so please come in.”

Naru and Lin-san briefly exchanged glances. All of us also exchanged glances.

What on earth had been set into motion?

The pair promptly went around the patio and appeared at the doorway.

“Come, come, please take a seat.”

Yasuhara-san pushed us aside to make spots for the two. He sat Naru and Lin-san down there, then sat himself down in front of them with a serious expression.

“...So, this is it.”

What will he ask?

“Which do you prefer, Darjeeling or Earl Grey tea?”

Naru furrowed his brows.

“Don't worry about tea. What did—”

“So then, which would you like? Would you like it hot or would you like it cold? How strong would you like it? Would you like it with milk or lemon? Or would you like Cambric Tea or Chai? Or would you like it flavored with apple? We have cookies and cold butter cake, but which would you like to have? Both?”

...*stunned*

“You see, it’s complicated, right?”

When Yasuhara-san grinned, Naru sighed.

“Is that what you wanted to know?”

“That is what I wanted to know.”

Naru sighed even deeper at Yasuhara-san’s completely serious reply.

“...Anything is fine.”

Waahhh. Does that mean Naru and Lin-san were drawn out by tea?

“Splendid. As one would expect from [Echigoya!](#)”

“How cunning!”

“[Master Smooth-talker!](#)”

Chapter 11: August 14th 3:00 pm - 3:30 pm

1

“What will you do after you close the office?”

It was Yasuhara-san who asked such a bold question.

“Is that something that concerns you, Yasuhara-san?”

...See, even if you ask, that doesn't mean he'll say.

“Yes, it is.”

Yasuhara-san didn't seem at all fazed.

“Isn't it obvious? Come on, we're good friends, right?”

Naru looked at Yasuhara-san with an extremely icy stare.

“I wasn't aware of that.”

“Oh? You didn't realize that? Aren't we friends?”

Ooh, a bold remark.

“I have no knowledge of that.”

“You're cold. Even though we're all very fond of you, Shibuya-san.”

“If this is your usual joke, you're dealing with the wrong person.”

“It's true! Well, even now, we were just talking about how Shibuya-san is a nice person.”

Naru smiled faintly.

“Thank you for that vast misconception.”

...this is useless.

“Did you expressly invite me here for the sake of such trivial conversation?”

“It's not trivial! We're just concerned about what our beloved Shibuya-san and Lin-san will do from now on.”

“Your concern is unnecessary.”

“It’s natural for someone to worry about people they favor.”

“Then, thank you in advance for your unnecessary concern.”

“Whether I like someone is my own choice.”

“I think what I do from here onward is also my own choice. —Don’t worry about it. It’s nothing that will inconvenience any of you.”

Yasuhara-san sighed.

“Is there a reason you wish to hide everything like this? Or is it because you want to create distance between all of us?”

“You may interpret it however you please.”

“Shibuya-san, do you mean you don’t care even if I think you actually hate the people who are in this room and it makes you so sick that you can’t stand us invading your privacy?”

“Even if you think so, I don’t care in the least.”

...This cold-blooded creature!

“Got it.”

Ugh, I’ve had enough already.

“To be sure, I understand perfectly that you hate us.”

2

I indecorously stood in the middle of the room with my feet planted wide. I'm that angry right now. Today is the day I cannot pardon it!

"If you hate us, then go head and hate us. But if that's the case, then why involve us?"

Naru slightly frowned.

"Involve?"

"That's right. You're the one who asked me to work part-time. You're the one who called everyone whenever there was an investigation even though they're neither part-time workers, nor investigators!"

You, you!!

"If you hate us that much, you shouldn't have involved us to begin with!"

Naru lightly pressed his fingers to his forehead.

"...I can hear you without you barking."

This—

"At any rate, you probably only see us as dogs and cats. That's fine, though. Why do you think everyone is here? Everyone is here because we were concerned about you being hospitalized and stayed."

"There's also the term known as, 'Curious Onlooker.'"

"Stop messing around!!!"

I'm furious!

"If you think everyone stayed out of a sense of curiosity, then you're an idiot."

"I didn't know I was an idiot."

"Is that so? Then since this is a good opportunity, why don't you learn it? If

you don't know why everyone was worried, then you're an idiot!"

I thrust out a finger.

"Since we're good and kind compassionate people, we get worried when an acquaintance collapses. —First of all, if the other person is someone you find disagreeable, why come calling at every investigation? Each and every time it's a dangerous experience, but everyone always helps you because we think there's some good even in a guy like you. We forgive you for such a personality. That is goodwill. Do you understand?"

"I don't recall soliciting your goodwill."

"Ridiculous! You really are slow, aren't you? —Of course, this is everyone's one-sided goodwill! Still, everyone obligingly helps you. If that goodwill is an annoyance, then you shouldn't tell us to lend you a hand! If you understood everyone's goodwill and exploited it, then you are a despicable person. And if you didn't understand that goodwill to begin with, then you are an utter fool."

Naru breathed a small sigh.

"...Well? What do you want me to do?"

"When goodwill is directed at someone, there's something known as polite behaviour. Since you've been resting on everyone's goodwill up to this point, you should at least feel obligated to show some good faith."

In response, Naru's expression was ice cold.

"It seems like it's not obligation, but Mai's selfish hope. Although, you speak as if expressing everyone's opinion."

"All right then, my opinion. —Even I have directed goodwill towards you on my own. I'm entitled to hope for a sincere response."

"One's hopes don't always come true."

"Right back at you. You want to return home like this without making it all clear, but things seldom go as one wishes. The world is not kind enough for everything to work out for your convenience!!"

"Huh?"

Huh what? This guy looks down on the rest of the world!

“I’ll take your picture to a TV station and say you’re an Qigong Master!”

Naru looked at me wearily.

“...What exactly are you upset about?”

“Everything! It doesn’t matter even if I can never see you again. I don’t even want to see someone as callous as you, either! Still, I don’t like uncertainty like this!”

“Whoa, whoa!”

Bou-san struck my head.

3

“Don’t pummel me so easily!”

“Cool off. I get it, so calm down a bit.”

What do you get? Grrr.

“I understand that you’re angry, but Naru-bou has his reasons, too. Don’t get so worked up.”

“Naru does as he pleases, so I’ll do as I please.”

I’ll send letters to every single editor in the media. Fortunately, there’s an occult boom nowadays. So, if the media chases after him, then it serves him right. Hohohohoho.

“The point is, you don’t want things to end with the uncertain remaining uncertain, right?”

“That’s right.”

“Once it becomes clear, then will you be satisfied?”

I looked blankly at Bou-san.

“If it becomes clear, of course. —But, do you think this blockhead will talk? ”

“I don’t know.”

Bou-san said, then looked at Naru.

“You, are you unwilling to crack?”

In response, Naru was expressionless.

“I don’t feel the necessity.”

Bou-san looked up at the ceiling and sighed.

“You’re a stubborn one. —Well then, I’d like to ask you some questions, but

will you give me answers?”

“I don’t feel like holding a pointless question and answer session.”

Bou-san raised his eyebrows.

“Well then, do you feel like holding small talk?”

“It's a waste of time.”

With that parting shot, Naru stood up.

“Sometimes in life, futility is necessary.”

Saying so, a smiling Yasuhara-san leaned his back against the door of the entrance.

“Are you resorting to force?”

“Of course not. I just fancy this door.”

“Will you move away from there for a moment?”

“I don’t want to because I’ve fallen passionately in love with this door.”

Naru glanced towards Lin-san.

“I can pass through by force.”

“If you come through by force, it’ll be painful.”

That’s right. Yasuhara-san’s ribs are still broken.

“I think it’ll only aggravate your injury.”

“That would be a problem. My injury would worsen, then we’d end up calling an ambulance. If I do something like let slip that I was assaulted by Lin-san, a policeman will even come.”

“According to the situation, the aggressor is you.”

“That’s even more troublesome.”

Yasuhara-san said so and smiled with his honor student smile.

“Let’s try to proceed with the current situation peaceable. I would hate to damage a shining career and I’m sure Shibuya-san would also hate to be questioned by the police and have what he’s hiding become an open secret.”

Naru sighed.

“...I don’t think it’s something to get so worked up about like this.”

Bou-san smiled wryly.

“Well, that’s your own opinion. Still, humans can’t feel at ease if an uncertainty remains unresolved.”

Naru sighed again and looked back at Bou-san.

“Five minutes.”

“So stingy. I want thirty minutes.”

“Fifteen minutes.”

Bou-san smiled complacently.

“OK. Fifteen minutes, then.”

4

...What's going on?

When I vacantly looked around the inside of the room, Yasuhara-san and John had oddly knowing expressions. On top of that, these guys have been hanging out.

"What's this all about?"

Ayako gave voice to my feelings.

Bou-san smiled smugly.

"Making the opaque transparent, right? That's why I have to proceed quickly."
"

Huh?

"Well now."

Saying so, Bou-san looked at Naru.

"The first thing I had doubts about was the name."

I didn't understand why. I poked Bou-san.

"...Name?"

"Shibuya of Shibuya is something that's too good to be true."

"Oh?"

"Mai, didn't you think it was odd? The director who runs an office in Shibuya is named Shibuya."

I...I didn't think it was particularly odd.

"Isn't it a coincidence?"

"There are only three conceivable possibilities. One: Mere coincidence. Two:

He chose an office in Shibuya as a pun since his name is Shibuya. Three: It's an alias."

"An alias!?"

Bou-san nodded.

"Right. If it was me or Shōnen, it would probably be a pun. But alas, that wouldn't be like Naru-bou."

...That's true. Naru is the type of person who's opposed to jokes and puns.

"It being a coincidence is the most likely. There aren't many places in Tokyo with such prime location. It's even possible that there's an Aoyama-san in Aoyama and even a Ginza-san in Ginza."

"There's no Ginza!"

"Okay, okay. But, there was something else that bothered me."

Bou-san said and stared fixedly at Naru.

"It was when we first met. Do you remember Naru's words? 'You also addressed me without honorifics just now.'"

...I remember.

That is what he said. Naru had called me "Mai" without honorifics and I complained, "Oh, you addressed someone without honorifics." Then he said, "You also called me like that just now."

"It was an odd line, so it left a strange impression. Mai didn't particularly address Naru without honorifics. She only called him by a nickname. From 'Naru the Narcissist'. —However,"

Saying that, Bou-san directed his gaze towards Lin-san.

"Lin also calls Naru so. —This is strange."

I stared in puzzlement.

"Why?"

"Does Lin seem like the type to call his boss 'Naru the Narcissist'? If 'Naru' was a nickname that came from 'Naru the Narcissist' as Mai said, then absolutely,

definitely, most certainly, Lin, at least, would not call him 'Naru'. —Am I wrong?"

...That's true...

"Well, actually, we have no choice but to ask those in question, but I doubt it. So, that's why I became slightly suspicious. —Maybe Shibuya Kazuya is an alias and his real name is Naru."

5

His real name is Naru—?

When I inadvertently looked back, Naru's expression was impassive as always.

"...How shrewd of you."

"Humph. The fun's just getting started."

Bou-san laughed, then began aimlessly walking around the inside of the room.

"If so, there wouldn't be any harm even if Lin called him 'Naru' as if natural. Thinking so, I suddenly realize that I've never seen proof that Naru's real name is really 'Shibuya Kazuya.'"

...Now that you mention it...

"But Bou-san, what about me? Have you ever seen proof that my name is Taniyama Mai?"

"I haven't."

Saying so, Bou-san smiled.

"However, Naru's circumstances are different from yours, Mai. For one thing, Naru-bou was hospitalized once before."

"Ah, for a little while."

"Right. At that time, Naru-bou's hospital room didn't have a nameplate."

"...True..."

"The hospital room's nameplate is where the person's name from the insurance card should be written. However, for some reason, the nameplate was blank. Of course, that means his real name wasn't presented at the time it was supposed to be."

'But,' Ayako said.

“This time there was a proper nameplate. ‘Shibuya Kazuya’ was written on it.”

That’s right.

“It was, wasn’t it?”

That being said, Bou-san smiled smugly.

“Naru-bou was hospitalized twice and of that number, there was a nameplate this time, but there wasn’t one on the previous occasion. And then, though he previously refused visits, this time he didn’t say anything when we went to visit almost daily. Furthermore, I don’t know about the last time, but this time, Naru-bou said there was no insurance and was required to pay outrageous medical fees.”

I tilted my head to the side in confusion.

“In other words? Does that mean he inadvertently gave his real name at the hospital the previous time, so the nameplate was blank?”

Right?

“Then, naturally, the doctors and nurses would know his real name, wouldn’t they? So, I wonder if that means he banned visits so his real name wouldn’t be conveyed to us? —Then that means he deliberately said he didn’t have an insurance card so that wouldn’t happen this time and stuck with his alias in exchange for expensive medical fees?”

“Exactly. It’s only a guess. However, I think the possibility that ‘Shibuya Kazuya’ is an alias is extremely high.”

...Hmm.

“Well, let’s say that ‘Shibuya’ is a fake name. Even if his real name is Naru, this is also strange. Naru— it’s not a surname you hear too much. Well, how about as a first name? Naru, Naru. This name isn’t too likely either.”

Suddenly, I asked,

“Isn’t it that? The alias ‘Narumi’ that he used during that case. That’s actually his real name and ‘Naru’ is the abbreviation.”

“I think it’s different. What about that line he used? He said, ‘Addressed me

without honorifics.’”

...That’s true...

“So,”

Saying this, Bou-san directed his gaze to Naru.

“Can you at least tell me whether ‘Shibuya Kazuya’ is an alias or your real name?”

Naru smiled very thinly.

“...I don’t feel obligated to answer.”

“Oh, is that so. Well then, fine. Let’s move on.”

I blinked in surprise and looked up at Bou-san.

“Is there still something more?”

“Is there, you ask? Of course there is.”

6

"I think that Naru = 'Shibuya Kazuya' is very suspicious. Not just the name. Naru-bou's private life is more or less a mystery. Under these circumstances, I can't say there isn't any indication of him going to school. I thought about this and it's unnatural. Obviously, Naru wants to conceal the place where he's living."

"That's right."

He won't tell even if you ask.

"Why is the matter hidden?"

"Of course, he's thinking of the possibility that admirers will pursue him."

"Rejected. Running an office, there'd be no point to only hiding at home. There's only one possible answer. In short, there's the possibility that the place of Naru's residence is somewhere that just by being leaked out will expose the thing Naru wants to hide."

"The thing he wants to hide?"

"It's Naru's identity. He wants to conceal his profile. The place of his residence holds the risk of revealing his profile as soon as it's location is discovered. Therefore, he hides it. Am I wrong?"

In the direction of Bou-san's gaze was Naru's white face, which held an expression as if the matter wasn't any of his concern.

"...are you requesting a reply?"

Being told so, Bou-san breathed lightly.

"Hey, Mai. Looking at a house, there are any number of things to discover about the residents of the house, yeah? Whether it's a single house or an apartment, whether it's big or small, whether the level of its architecture is high

grade or low grade. The size of the garden, whether they keep a dog, the number of cars, the number of residents— There are a lot of things you can deduce from that place. Don't you think so?"

"Yeah."

"If 'Shibuya' is an alias, then there would be a nameplate with his real name hanging there. So, I understand why he hides his house. However, why does he hide his phone number?"

"Of course... if you know the area code, you can find out which area he lives in and if you patiently look for it in the phonebook, then you can even find the address, right?"

"Can you find a house with only the area code?"

"Um..."

I doubt it?

"There's nothing you can do unless the number is published in a phonebook. In other words, there's no need to hide the number if Naru owns a private phone. There's a need to adamantly conceal it because he doesn't have a personal phone. For example, consider the case where there's a call."

"A call?"

"Right. For example, the case where he lives with his family. In this case, the family doesn't know Naru is intentionally hiding his profile. If you knew his number, his family might carelessly make conversation with you."

"Hmm?"

"With that, there's the case where there's nothing but a shared phone. If there's a phone call, a landlord or family member who isn't aware of his situation may answer. In that case, for someone who wants to hide his profile, it might be slightly awkward."

...Naru living in a boarding house with nothing but a shared phone...that's something difficult to imagine.

"—Of course, there are also ways to get the people around him to keep quiet, but this guy can't do that. There are circumstances that make it impossible. So,

he won't give out his phone number."

"In that case, wouldn't he only need to have a private phone installed?"

It was Ayako who interrupted.

"That would be more natural than unnaturally hiding his phone number. It would be convenient for arranging phone calls. Naru even has an income, so there's no reason not to have a phone installed, right?"

"Probably not. —I agree with you, Ayako. That's right. What do you think this means?"

Ayako looked up toward the ceiling.

"I don't think he couldn't have a phone installed with his type of income, do you? Then, his family won't let him install a phone. Otherwise, his landlord won't let him install one."

"Right."

"Also, whether it's his family or landlord, why wouldn't they cooperate in hiding his profile?"

"Exactly. Moreover, among these, I think the possibility that his family won't let him install a phone is low. "

—Huh?

"Why?"

'Come on,' Bou-san smiled wryly.

"Naru-bou is a minor, isn't he? He should need his guardian's consent to rent an office, install a phone, or doing anything, right?"

"Oh, I see."

"Naru appears confident when he says he's the person in charge of the office. In other words, at the least, Naru's parents aren't cooperating in what he's doing. An alternative to cooperation is acquiescence. Well then, wouldn't they at least let him install a phone?"

"...Surely."

“In other words, the place where Naru-bou lives is rental housing or a place resembling that, the landlord is difficult to persuade, and it’s a place where you can’t install a private phone.”

...What kind of place is it? Even in the apartment building where I live, you can install a phone. There’s only a common phone, it’s an apartment with a difficult landlord or...

Ayako glared at Bou-san.

“I’ll hit you if you say it’s an apartment building like that.”

Bou-san smiled wryly.

“It’s possible there are apartment buildings like that, but I don’t think so.”

Huh?

“It can’t be a house, or even a maisonette or apartment. —It’s a hotel, isn’t it?”

7

“Ah.”

“Ah.”

Ayako and I spoke in unison.

Bou-san nodded.

“If the place where he lives is a hotel, it would be awkward to give out his phone number. Because the front desk answers. It seems like it would be difficult to persuade the front desk and work out an arrangement. There are also places where you can install a phone, but well, the story is complicated. For the time being, if he doesn’t urgently need a personal phone, then it’s much easier to hide his phone number.”

“But, that means...”

I looked at Naru. What kind of person lives in a hotel? For so long, too.

“Naru is not someone from Tokyo. Also, he has no desire to settle down in Tokyo.”

...Was it something like that...?

“He said he was looking for his older brother this whole time, right? Perhaps this guy came to Tokyo in order to search for his older brother and is staying at a hotel for the time being. He didn’t think it would take so long. Therefore, he didn’t feel like looking for a proper residence. —Am I wrong?”

Everyone’s gaze focused on Naru, but the facial expression of the man in question was unflinching.

“I don’t feel obligated to respond.”

Ayako raised her voice just as Bou-san sighed in disappointment.

“Wait a minute!”

“What?”

“Even though Naru was searching for his older brother, this is actually Nagano, right? Naru was probably traveling for some time in order to look for this place. He was flying around all over Japan. So, there wasn’t any need to establish a stop over point in Tokyo to the extent of living in a hotel, right?”

“That’s it. For example, in your case, Ayako, what would you do?”

“In my case, I would follow the clues with my home as a stop over point. That’s sensible and less expensive.”

“That’s right. But, what if his home is much farther away? How about if going to Hokkaido from his home is farther than going to Hokkaido from Tokyo?”

“That’s true, but...”

“But what kind of place is that?”

When I asked, Bou-san laughed.

“You should try to think about it from your own perspective, Mai. Someone important to you dies somewhere. Why would it be necessary for you to take the trouble of relocating to wherever that was?”

Naru truly was running throughout Japan. In other words, the place where his brother was located may have been Hokkaido and it may have been Okinawa. If that’s the case, it seems like it’s the same wherever one lives. It wouldn’t be necessary to take the trouble to relocate... No, wait.

“...a foreign country.”

If the place where someone disappeared was America and not Japan, then, going to America somehow, there would be no choice but to stay in a hotel or apartment, right?

I looked at Naru. Ayako looked at Naru, too.

Bou-san nodded.

“Exactly. —There are several supporting factors. For example, he’s weak with aphorisms and proverbs. He’s also weak with kanji. He even said so himself, ‘I’m not too good at Kanji.’ He uses a Western language to take notes during

investigations, and a Western language is often used to organize the data at the office. There are times when I've seen him reading Japanese, but I've never seen him writing Japanese."

"Ah..."

When I murmured, Bou-san raised an eyebrow and looked at me.

"When we first met, after he was asked what grade he was in, he said he was seventeen. I thought it was a very strange answer."

Afterwards, I convinced myself it was because he didn't go to school.

"See? —When this is combined with previously discussing that his name might actually be an alias, everything fits exactly into place. This guy is not Japanese."

"But..."

"Someone's not necessarily Japanese just because he looks Japanese and speaks Japanese. Lin is a good example. Don't you agree?"

Lin-san's Japanese is very fluent. Even his outward appearance looks completely Japanese, but still, he's not Japanese.

"Viewed in this way, I understand why he doesn't go to school. As long as he lives in a hotel, he can't go through the transfer procedures. He couldn't go even if he wanted to go, and he doesn't want to go."

"...That's true."

Ayako tilted her head.

"Then, Hong Kong?"

"I thought that, too. 'Is he possibly Chinese?' However, I didn't really think so with a name like Naru. Well, it's faster to ask the person himself about it."

Saying so, Bou-san asked Naru,

"—Where were you born, Naru?"

Naru didn't reply. Focusing his dark gaze on Bou-san, he simply gave him a sardonic smile.

Once again, Bou-san lightly sighed.

Chapter 12: August 14th 3:30 pm - 4:00 pm

1

“—Will you remain silent to the last?”

Bou-san said sullenly and looked up.

“Then I’ll simply keep going. Let’s move on to the next.”

“Next?”

There’s m-more!?

“Yes. Another thing I was insanely curious about was how he got that much equipment. How much do you think it all costs? I’m telling you, it’s in the tens of millions. Hundred millions, probably. It’s not an amount securable by a kid of seventeen or so. No matter how rich of a family he comes from, there should be a generous patron. —Will you answer this if I ask, Naru?”

“...It would be bad if I stole Bou-san’s rare moment of spotlight.”

That being said, Bou-san lightly scowled.

“You’ve got nerve to say that. —Another thing. The matter of whether the office really belongs to Naru himself. As I said earlier, Naru-bou is still a minor. The management company of the building containing the office, the bank with the office account, and so on, would they agree to anything with a director that’s underage?”

...hmm.

“Also, I further wondered why Mai can’t answer calls. She also can’t open letters. In fact, she’s not allowed to touch the mail. It’s handed over to Mai after Lin completely sorts it. Mai, have you seen the mail that comes to the office in its original state?”

“...No.”

“The truth is, the typical work of an office clerk is to answer calls and sort

letters. However, you're not allowed to do that. Why?"

...Now that you mention it, it's certainly strange...

"It seems as if he's trying to keep others away from the mail and phone calls. If that's so, then why? There is only one possible explanation for this. The mail and phone calls most often contain information that shouldn't be known by others. If we consider the case of a letter, there's the possibility that something he doesn't want known is written in such a thing as the address, postmark, or return address."

"Oh, I see!"

I unintentionally clapped my hands.

"In other words, because he's using an alias, right? If 'Shibuya Kazuya' is an alias, then there's the possibility that his real name is written on the letter."

Bou-san lightly shrugged his shoulders.

"Except, that's not going to happen. That place is an office. In general, mail personally addressed to Naru won't come. If it comes, the majority should be letters addressed to 'Shibuya Psychic Research.'"

"Oh, I see."

...Hmm.

"Well then, maybe he wants to hide mail that comes from a foreign country? There's no need to do that. Books are sent to us from abroad, but that hasn't been hidden."

"Is that so? Would it seem suspicious in the case where just a letter addressed to the office comes from abroad? A phone call? Nowadays, international calls are the same as long distance calls. There's no [exchange](#). It's just a matter of getting the caller to keep silent about something."

"Yeah."

"That's why I just gave free rein to my imagination. For example, what if the addressee's name on the letter was wrong? In all likelihood, this guy is using an alias. What if the name of the office, 'Shibuya Psychic Research', is also an alias? If so, wouldn't there be a need to hide it?"

2

I tilted my head to the side.

“That’s impossible. If the office name is wrong, then we can’t receive mail, right?”

When I said so, Bou-san grinned.

“That’s not necessarily the case.”

Huh?

“There’s the office name ‘Shibuya Psychic Research’. At the same time, there also exists the abbreviation ‘SPR’. Right?”

“I guess.”

“Which is the official name?”

Eh?

“I... I don’t understand your meaning.”

“It’s a difficult topic for someone like you, Mai, but after opening an office, it’s necessary to register it. You need to report it properly. The name of the office used on that registration is either ‘Shibuya Psychic Research’ or ‘SPR’.”

“...Oh.”

“As for the mail, ultimately, it will arrive with whatever name. If you want to make it more reliable, you can just put a nameplate on the mailbox. That’s how it is. Still, you can’t brazenly hang up a sign for ‘Shibuya Psychic Research’ for a place that’s registered as ‘Tanaka Psychic Research’.”

“Is...is that how it is?”

“That’s how it is. Even if it’s registered as ‘Shibuya Psychic Research’ and you put up a sign for ‘SPR’, well, it’s not very problematic. The reverse is also true.

Even if it's registered as 'SPR' and you put up a sign for 'Shibuya Psychic Research', it's not likely that it will be too much trouble. If you write 'Shibuya Psychic Research' small across it."

"O-okay."

Talk about a difficult topic.

"Therefore, I wonder which is the official name. —Will you also remain silent about this?"

Bou-san looked at Naru, but once again, Naru didn't reply.

"Umm... I still don't really understand what you're getting at..."

When I spoke timidly, Bou-san,

"In other words, 'SPR' is not an abbreviation for 'Shibuya Psychic Research'. Rather, it's more that 'SPR' gave form to 'Shibuya Psychic Research'."

...??

"I don't understand the meaning at all."

Bou-san smiled wryly.

"In conclusion, the official name of that office is 'SPR'. Phone calls and letters get addressed to 'SPR'. Not wanting that to be known by you, Mai, you were deliberately being kept away from the phone calls and letters."

"Huh?"

"Moreover, the name 'Shibuya Psychic Research' has no meaning. The words can be turned into the abbreviation 'SPR'. Even 'Sasaki Psychic Research', 'Stroll Psychic Research', 'Saury Psychic Research', or anything would be all right. The word was made Shibuya because the place where there happened to be an office was Shibuya. —How was that?"

Bou-san looked at Naru. Naru smiled thinly.

"Even if that's so, don't you think that's not worth hiding from Mai? Even if the letters were addressed to 'SPR', I expect Mai wouldn't care."

...Yeah.

“I don’t. In fact, the bank’s transfer notice is also ‘SPR’ and there are such items among the mail as well.”

“If it’s ‘SPR’. But what if another name is written? ‘SPR’ is, of course, an abbreviation. An abbreviation of what? Let’s say, for example, it’s ‘[Shimauma Panda Rakko](#)’. What if the official name of the office is ‘Shimauma Panda Rakko’ and ‘SPR’ is the abbreviation? And what if, rather than the abbreviation, the official name was on a letter? If the addressee was ‘Shimauma Panda Rakko’, how suspicious would even you think it was, Mai?”

...I would think so. Certainly, I would think so.

“Come on, join in. This ‘SPR’, extremely expensive equipment, and Naru seemingly not being Japanese. When you shake and mix, one answer comes out.”

“Oh!”

Ayako cried out. Bou-san nodded at that and,

“Right. ‘Society of Psychical Research.’ It’s the oldest authoritative spiritual investigation organization in the United Kingdom. Don’t you think so? ‘Shibuya Psychic Research’ is a disguise to hide from the public. In fact, don’t you think that office is the Japanese branch of that ‘spiritual investigation organization’?”

“...”

“If Naru is an official investigator of that ‘spiritual investigation organization’, then it would also explain that equipment. That equipment belongs to that ‘spiritual investigation organization’. It doesn’t personally belong to Naru. Moreover, this hypothesis comes with another bonus.”

“Bonus?”

“Right. Assuming Naru is someone from ‘SPR’, I can also guess why he uses an alias to hide his identity.”

“Hey, hey, why?”

Bou-san grinned.

“This guy was called ‘Naru’ by Mai and used the phrase, ‘without honorifics.’ If our assumptions are correct thus far, and we decide this guy isn’t Japanese,

this also has one interpretation.”

“What is it?”

“Hint: ‘SPR’, Naru. ”

“I don’t know!”

“Tom is a male name, but it’s also a nickname. Do you know what it’s a nickname of?”

Huh? An English pop quiz?

“...Umm, Thomas?”

“Right. Mike?”

“Michael.”

“Tony?”

“Anthony.”

“All right. This time it’s a little difficult. Dick?”

“Umm...”

Ayako answered,

“Richard.”

“OK. Then— Naru?”

...Eh?

Bou-san laughed a little at me, who was staring hard, then returned his gaze to Naru.

“Let’s assume Naru is, for example, an Englishman. In other words, he’s someone from an English-speaking country. Then, even siblings, for example, hardly use terms like, ‘**Niichan**’ and ‘**Neechan**’. Generally, they call them by their names without honorifics. Friends and acquaintances, also.”

“...Okay.”

“Well, they’re tolerant of being called without honorifics. In other words, with ‘John-kun’, ‘kun’ is attached to the word, ‘John.’ Well, what would you use in

the case where you want to address someone very close in a friendly manner without honorifics?”

“...Is it a nickname?”

I looked at John. John smiled elegantly.

“—Exactly, in the case of ‘John’ it’s ‘Jack’. ...A special nickname, a special middlename. His nickname, perhaps. In other words, practically upon your first meeting, you suddenly called Naru-bou by a certain nickname only used by someone from his most inner circle. That’s why he said, ‘Addressed me without honorifics.’”

—Is that so? I see.

“But, what is Naru?”

“Tell her, John.”

Under Bou-san’s gaze, John hesitated as if slightly troubled.

“...If it’s Noll, it’s a nickname for Oliver... [Orivā](#).”

...Orivā?

“Oliver-san of ‘SPR’. There’s one. An important person who must hide his identity.”

...That’s....

“Dr. Davis...?”

No one opened their mouth. The words I softly spoke abruptly fell within the silence.

“Is that so?”

Falling under everyone’s gaze, Naru smiled wryly.

“I don’t think there’s a need to reply.”

After saying so, he suddenly moved his body from the glass door that his back was leaning against and turned toward the entrance.

“It’s been fifteen minutes.”

That being said, Yasuhara-san moved away from the front of the door. Passing

by him, Naru went outside. —Without any facial expression, either.

3

While he looked after Naru, who left everyone without a word, Bou-san cried out in discontent.

“At this point, he’s feigning ignorance.”

It was Lin-san who replied to that.

“Naru said there was no need to reply.”

Lin-san smiled just a bit of a wry smile.

“That means, after having come this far, it’s not necessary to reply.”

“Then, it’s as I thought...?”

I looked between Lin-san and Bou-san. It was Bou-san who nodded.

“It seems like.”

...Now I understand...

Bou-san sat down on the spot with a thump.

“Oliver Davis is a parapsychologist belonging to the ‘SPR’, an up-and-coming researcher who acquired a doctorate in parapsychology at a young age. If you write the ‘V’ with a ‘ㄣ’, it’s Orivā Deivisu. Normally, he’s introduced following the famous spiritualist Andrew Jackson Davis as [Orivā Deibisu](#) or [Oribā Deibisu](#). Owing to the fact that he almost never makes an appearance, his profile is unclear. What little is known about him is that he has the ability of psychometry and possesses strong PK. It’s also certain that he’s siblings with the superior spiritualist Eugene Davis.”

“Okay.”

“This Eugene Davis disappeared on an island country in the Far East. Dr. Davis came to Japan to look for his sibling. It would be an uproar if the mass media knew about it. Like when [Peter Hurkos](#) came to Japan, he would literally be

followed around endlessly by TV, magazines, and those searching for missing persons. So, he hides his identity.”

“...I see.”

“So then, Naru knowing the terrain of this place and not it’s name is explainable without any trouble. Naru-bou used psychometry. By way of a vision, he witnessed his older brother thrown here, but there was no further information. So, he virtually had no choice but to travel here.”

“Then, is that why he had Masako’s comb during the investigation that one time?”

“I guess that’s the case. He had the comb to confirm what had become of Masako. Put simply, whether she was alive or dead.”

Bou-san scratched his head somewhat apologetically, “—Unfortunately for Masako-chan.”

Masako simply gave a slight shadow of a smile.

“I was aware that it was the case.”

“But, why did you know, Masako-chan?”

“Because I saw a video.”

...Video?

“When I was invited to America by the ‘ASPR’, I saw a video there.”

Bou-san leaned forward.

“By any chance, was the video... that famous one?”

“Yes.”

I pulled on Bou-san’s shirt. I didn’t understand what was being talked about.

“Previously, Dr. Davis did a PK experiment. There’s a video of it. I told you before. About an extremely rigorous experiment...”

“Where he threw a 50 kilo block of aluminum against a wall?”

“Right. That video must be in some kind of major psychic-related laboratory where it’s something never removed from the premises.”

“Really...”

“It was quite an impressive video, so I remembered it. Therefore, when I first met him, I thought I had seen his face somewhere...”

Oh, I see...

“I remembered it after that case. That is why, after I told Naru, he said he wanted me to keep it secret...”

I briefly glared at Masako.

“Then you threatened him with the information, didn’t you?”

“Huh, I wonder what you mean?”

Bastard, so that’s why.

Ayako applauded half-heartedly.

“Anyhow, I feel relieved. Now he can do as he pleases and go back home to England or wherever. —Not too bad, you depraved monk.”

“Shut up! My head’s not a decoration, unlike yours.”

“Well, yours isn’t worth decorating.”

“Well, *you* have bad taste.”

Ah, there they go again. Paying that no mind, Yasuhara-san, “Takigawa-san seems like he’s not paying attention, but he’s surprisingly observant of the details.”

Yeah. True enough. Saying he’s observant is a compliment, but I can also tell you he’s annoyingly nitpicky.

“When Takigawa-san first talked about this, I wondered if he had gone senile due to the heat.”

“I’m old, after all.”

That is an undeniable fact.

‘Anyway,’ I said to Bou-san and Yasuhara-san, then looked around for John.

“When I was wondering what you were hanging out and whispering about, you were talking about this stuff, right?”

Bou-san smiled in a slightly wry manner.

“There was nothing else to do with our free time.”

After saying so, he became a little serious, “To tell the truth, it didn’t click until after Naru-bou collapsed just recently.”

“Huh?”

“He displayed his insane Qigong, right?”

“Yeah.”

“I don’t know much about Qigong, but still, even if that was Qigong, I don’t know that it’s that insane. His style is also unusual for Qigong.”

“...Yeah. Lin-san said it was similar, but different.”

“Well, that’s why I thought it was PK. Originally, there was a theory that Qigong = PK.”

Hmm.

“Still, PK or whatever, that was extraordinary. When I thought so, I remembered that the Doctor is said to have extraordinary PK.”

“I see.”

“When I think about it, there are a lot of strange things that stuck. Including the spoon bending you saw previously. What we saw was a guy using tricks, but when you saw it, Naru-bou broke the neck of the spoon. If that’s true, then it was legitimately PK.”

“Yeah. That’s right.”

“Also, Naru-bou is excellent at gathering information. His intuition is strangely accurate.”

“Huh?”

“Which case was that? You know, the case involving the doll.”

“Minnie?”

“Right. He was strangely confident at the time, saying the doll wasn’t the problem. Even during the case at one of those schools, while walking in the

classroom, he suddenly asked, ‘Have you been doing seances?’”

W-was there something like that?

“Masako’s comb, *etc.* If you take all of that into consideration, it seems a lot like either psychometry or post cognition. On top of that, there was that investigation of the ‘fake Davis’ some time ago. Why did he need to do something like that? Even if Naru and Mori-san were officials of ‘SPR’, for some reason I wasn’t satisfied. —Well, when I think of it like that, many things are suddenly suspicious.”

“Yeah.”

‘Still,’ Bou-san said, scratching his head.

“I didn’t really know what Naru was a nickname for. Even though I borrowed a dictionary and tried to look it up, it wasn’t listed. Then I tried asking Shōnen and John.”

Yasuhara-san nodded meekly.

“Brown-san told us ‘Noll’ was a nickname for ‘Oliver’ and when we took that into consideration, everything was suspicious. In fact, how had we been fooled until now? —I blame Taniyama for this matter.”

“M-me?”

“Right.”

Speaking tersely, Yasuhara-san thrust his finger at me.

“It’s your fault, Taniyama-san. ‘Naru-chan the Narcissist’ fit too well, so I didn’t think to question it and unthinkingly accepted it.”

Aaaah... Well, *excuse me*...

4

Chuckling, Bou-san looked towards Lin-san, who had been quietly refraining.

“—Any problems with this, Lin?”

Once again, Lin-san smiled a slightly wry smile.

“It doesn’t seem like it.”

“There’s one thing I want to ask. Why was it necessary to set up the office?”

...I also really want to know that.

After Lin-san pondered for a moment, “There were hardly any clues to search for Gene... Eugene...”

“Gene? A nickname for Eugene?”

“Yes. It was undoubtedly going to take time to look for him. It was impossible to go back and forth from England, so it was necessary to secure a foothold somewhere, but whatever the situation, the issue of funds remained.”

“The cost of living is high in Japan.”

“There’s a limit to personal sojourns. That’s why, as an interim measure while examining all quarters, we decided to establish a branch office under the pretext of investigating the present condition of psychical research and spiritual phenomenon in Japan.”

“I see, no wonder the request fee is cheap. Naturally, there’s no sense for profit. You can’t conduct business in an ‘SPR’ branch office.”

“Exactly.”

“Then, is Naru-bou your boss in the branch office?”

“Yes. More or less, Naru is the division head.”

Really?

“Even though Naru-bou is younger?”

“Age is irrelevant. Naru has performance in his favor, so as a researcher, he has seniority.”

“—While we’re at it, can I ask another question?”

“If I can answer it.”

“Nationality, is it English?”

“Naru? That’s right.”

Bou-san looked towards John for a moment.

“I heard that **Naru** is an American pronunciation.”

“Naru lived in the United States until he was about eight.”

“Then, are both his parents Japanese emigrants?”

“Professor Davis is a natural-born Englishman. Naru and Eugene were originally adopted.”

—Huh?

I looked at Lin-san's expressionless face once again.

“The two were orphans. Professor Davis adopted them.”

...I see. Naru was also an orphan.

Although, unlike me, Naru had an older brother. But still... that older brother is dead...

“Originally, only Eugene used the name Naru.”

I wasn’t the only one who was a little stunned.

“Then, Naru will return to England once he finds his older brother’s remains.”

I murmured so, not expecting a response.

...Therefore, like Masako said, we won’t meet again...

“I have yet to hear anything regarding the matter.”

“But, he’s going to close the office, right?”

“That was a convenience for the sake of looking for Eugene. It was also used as an explanation for those who were assisting us in our stay.”

“If he finds his older brother, there’s no reason for him to stay in Japan.”

Both his parents live in England and his home is also there.

“I’m very sorry, but I’m unable to—”

For a moment, Lin-san was about to say something, but ultimately closed his mouth. He briefly looked around at us.

“May I ask a favor of you?”

"By all means."

Lin-san bowed slightly at Bou-san’s voice.

“I would like you to please keep this secret.”

Bou-san answered, ‘You got it,’ but Ayako raised her voice in protest.

“Hey, why are you so worried?”

“Because the Japanese media is greedy. They have no integrity or moderation. It would be humorously dramatized and it’s not likely to be pleasant.”

“That’s true, but...”

To that, Lin-san looked at the floor.

“Psychometry is perhaps the most inconvenient of all extrasensory perception abilities. The media will quickly grow bored, but there are some people who will not lose interest.”

“...?”

“Before coming to Japan, do you know how many letters a day were generally sent to Naru?”

...fan mail?

“At least twenty and as many as fifty. All of them were letters seeking aid, wanting him to look for a close relative who disappeared.”

“Oh...”

“It’s not a problem to search if the person is alive, but it’s often someone who’s dead. The people who send the letters are usually desperately hoping their relatives are alive somewhere.”

“That’s probably true...”

He really should try to avoid the media.

“Moreover, Naru is too capable. If the person he’s looking for is dead, it’s fine if he only sees it as mere information. But if the synchronization with the target is intense, he apparently experiences it as if it’s his own personal experience.”

Ayako and Masako looked back at me simultaneously.

“Mai had a dream like that once...”

Is it like that?

“Sometimes, in severe cases, he actually gets injured.”

“Injured?”

‘Yes,’ Lin-san nodded.

“When experiencing a vision, a severe bruise is produced in the same spot where the person he’s synchronizing with was injured and a strong paralysis develops... Therefore, Naru will not use psychometry unless the situation is serious. He sent back all the letters without opening them.”

...Really? That’s dreadful!

“Also...”

Lin-san started to say, then shook his head.

“Anyway, please.”

Chapter 13: August 14th 4:00 pm - 5:00 pm

1

Outside, as usual, was overflowing with sunlight so bright it was pure white.

After Lin-san went outside in chase of Naru, I took the opportunity to, for some reason or other, go for a walk by myself and trudged through the forest.

Although the sunlight was still bright, the cry of the evening cicadas could already be heard. The sound was lonesome and depressing. I felt something somewhat gloomy sinking in my chest.

Even I didn't understand what it was and grew steadily more depressed.

...I'm depressed. I wonder why.

I should feel more triumphant. I found out something I had been curious about for a long time.

...I wonder what's caught me in a mood like this.

I wandered aimlessly through the forest as I thought this and caught sight of a figure in front of me. He was standing against a tree.

As soon as I saw that figure, I abruptly understood.

Oh, I...

"I thought you went to see the lake."

When I said this, his jet black eyes, which were looking straight at me, quickly averted. Whether or not it was a trick of the light, his expression seemed slightly shadowed.

"...Right."

I muttered and walked over to the tree that Naru was leaning against.

"I'm sorry. For calling you 'Naru-chan' so easily."

"Why?"

His eyes, which turned back toward me when he asked, were truly deep.

“It was a name only your older brother used, right? I was completely unaware of that fact...”

Although, even Lin-san addresses him like that, so maybe it’s no longer such a private name.

“That’s something from when we were really little.”

“Hmm...”

Naru put his back against the opposite side of the thin tree he was leaning against.

“...You really are an amazing person.”

There was no response to my murmuring.

“Or perhaps I should say, the distance between us is noticeable. ...Heheh. I guess that’s why you refer to me as an idiot. Compared to you, I really am an idiot.”

...Undoubtedly, this is the cause of my depression.

“I suppose you’ll return to England soon.”

His family is there and it’s where his life is.

“Then you’ll return to the life before you met us. ...I can’t even imagine what kind of life that is. Somehow, the worlds we live in are completely different.”

“That’s not true.”

“Really? You don’t think so?”

“Just an idiot scientist.”

This was the first time he had referred to himself like that, so I inadvertently looked back behind me. His back was visible on the other side of the thin trunk.

I quickly turned my gaze back.

“I guess you were an orphan, too.”

“My situation was different from yours. I had a brother and was also blessed with adoptive parents.”

"I see. ...What kind of person was your older brother?"

"Who knows."

...Sure enough, he won't answer my questions.

"I'm glad I happened to run into you. I sort of wanted to apologize."

After I said this, I heard a quiet voice from behind me.

"I was looking for you."

"Oh?"

"There were a few things I wanted to tell you, so I thought it would be nice to see you."

"...Tell me what?"

Only his voice could be heard from behind me.

"...It's possible we might not meet again, so there was something I wanted to say, but..."

"But?"

"Perhaps I won't after all..."

'You're kidding me,' I silently muttered. He's keeping me in suspense.

I looked back behind me to tell him to say it, then heard the sound of footsteps treading through the undergrowth. At that moment, I involuntarily turned my gaze in the direction of the sound.

"...Huh?"

2

...What's this????

I felt my mind go momentarily blank. I quickly pulled myself together and looked back behind me. No one was there anymore.

—This can't be possible. Because that person was approaching me at a 15 degree angle to my front.

"Huh?"

I literally couldn't believe what I was seeing.

"What's the matter with you?"

That person, who had approached me at a 15 degree angle to my front, stopped.

Jet black hair and jet black eyes. Dressed completely in black.

"...Naru?"

He looked puzzled.

"You're really Naru, right?"

"What are you saying? Are you awake?"

"Um... I'm not sure."

How? What happened?

"—Who was here until just now?"

Naru tilted his head slightly to the side at my murmured words.

"Who was here?"

I pointed behind me where there was no longer anyone present.

"You. I was talking to you until just now. I'm sure of it."

Without a doubt. That wasn't a dream. I'm not nimble enough to sleep while standing.

"You were right next to me. What was that?"

"You were half asleep."

I flared up at his openly contemptuous voice.

"It was different! It was like my usual dream, but it absolutely wasn't a dream!"

"...Usual dream?"

Ah, I messed up...!

Naru moved his feet and came just a step closer.

"What is that?"

Naru's gameface. Now I won't be able to deceive him.

"It's just a dream..."

Again, he stepped forward a distance of one step. Now, if I stretched out my hand, the remaining distance was close enough to touch him. I was against the thin tree trunk, which was still at my back, so I felt somewhat cornered.

"What kind, then?"

"Nothing that concerns you."

"It didn't sound all that unrelated to me."

The color of his eyes was deep.

"I was here or something like that?"

"Or, it has nothing to do with you."

"I think it may have something to do with me."

"There's no need to pry so much."

"There's no need to hide it so much, either, right?"

"I'm not hiding..."

...Fine! I'll tell him already! After all, what's the possible aftermath? He'll

laugh at me and I'll slap his cheek, then I'll feel relieved once it's over.

"It's a dream... about you!"

...I said it...

Even I could tell that my face had gone bright red. And yet, despite this, he, on the other hand, merely looked puzzled. This cold fish!

"—About me?"

"That's right. About you. It's my selfish dream. Perhaps it's my wish. A dream about a gentle Naru."

Actually, you're not gentle at all, but this is implied irony to its fullest.

"Gentle—?"

"Yes. About you smiling gently and even speaking kindly to me."

I'll never accept that that's your subconscious.

Naru stared at me wide-eyed.

"...You were talking to me until just now?"

"Yeah. Got a problem?"

I don't know what I'm being so hostile for.

"—About what?"

"Insignificant trivialities. It was probably a daydream. —Of course it was a dream. A certain someone doesn't smile and won't even engage in idle chat with me. And you absolutely wouldn't search for me unless you had a task to order me to do."

This is the perfect confession. Ha-ha-ha.

Now you can laugh as much as you want. My right hand is already in position to slap you. Someone as cold-heartedly callous as you could never understand my maiden's heart anyway.

"...What does that mean?"

Naru appeared dumbfounded.

Being questioned like that, I couldn't help getting exasperated.

What does that mean? Isn't that obvious? Why do you think I was keeping quiet about the fact that you were appearing in my dreams until today?

Are you stupid!? You don't know!?"

"I don't understand."

Aaaah! I've had enough!

"That's right, of course you wouldn't. I knew you were an unfeeling, heartless person. Even so, isn't it human nature to unconsciously hope for a little bit of kindness where it can't be seen? You always smile whenever you appear in my dreams, and because of that, you seem gentle and concerned for me. —Of course, that's just my wish. Still, when I see that kind of dream, I sort of think, at the bottom of your heart, you're actually not such a cold-blooded human being. When that kept happening, my maiden's heart thought it was just your soul popping out to come see me!"

Now does that dimwitted brain of yours finally understand?

"I can't astral project."

...huh!?

"I can't do that. I wasn't blessed with that talent."

"I know. Obviously, I know that. That's just my wish."

"...that isn't it."

"If you're going to laugh, then laugh... huh?"

When I suddenly calmed down, the already white face of the person I was shouting at was completely pale.

"When... did that start?"

Feeling oddly disheartened, I was dumbfounded.

"When did the dream start? From the beginning..."

"...It's not me."

...huh?

“That isn’t me. ...It’s Gene...”

Eh?

“Who?”

He placed his white hand to his forehead as if fighting off dizziness.

“Eugene...”

“That... that isn’t so! I would definitely know even if you are brothers! It was absolutely you!”

“No. It’s Gene.”

“But!”

I’d never mistake him for someone else. It was about Naru.

“We’re twins.”

...What?

“If we were expressionless, no one could tell us apart. —He’s my twin brother.”

...Th...that...

“So... Gene was still wandering this world...”

Similarly, Naru’s eyes also seemed to be wandering somewhere in the distance.

3

“That was... your older brother?”

But he’s...

—Dead.

Then...

“It was... about your older brother...”

The memory fragments cracked and fell apart.

—Why didn’t I realize it?

When I think about it, it’s so simple.

The Naru I meet in my dream smiles. The real Naru doesn’t smile.

—He was a completely different person.

His personality and his way of talking... he was was a completely different person except for his appearance!

There were certainly times when I thought he seemed like a different person. No wonder. It was an entirely different person. I just didn’t notice it— Because they have the same face.

Because they have the same voice.

I thought it was Naru.

“Does he have regrets in this world...? That must be the case.”

Naru's low voice was sorrowful.

“...We might not meet again.”

When I murmured that, Naru turned his gaze to me.

“He said that earlier.”

“Yeah. If his body is found...”

Cutting off there, Naru closed his mouth.

There was nothing I could say, either.

“Mai. There’s something I want to ask you.”

Naru spoke after some time had passed.

“...What?”

“On one occasion, you had a vision of the past where your throat was cut. At that time, was there anything strange?”

“Something strange?”

Naru momentarily groped for words.

“I performed psychometry on a small item that was kept in that mansion. It was something like a vase or lamp. Yours was very similar to the vision I saw within that.”

“Eh?”

“You could say that it was almost identical in every detail. It was before your dream.”

“...What does that mean?”

Naru shook his head a little.

“I’ll change the angle of the question. Inside your dreams, what sort of role did Eugene play?”

—Role?

“...I don’t really know, but there was a time when he told me he showed me the direction of a dream. The rest of the time, he gave me advice and taught me various things. This time, your brother taught me a method to enter a trance state.”

“The method where you release the tension from your entire body while focusing on your breathing?”

“Yeah.”

Naru released a sigh.

“What is that idiot doing...”

Idiot? —Even in regards to his brother, Naru is Naru.

“For a spirit medium to lose his way even for a moment. When I thought he was already on the other side.”

“I guess he was worried about you.”

I said that for some reason.

Naru frowned in disgust.

“I haven’t fallen low enough for Gene to worry about me.”

—Conclusion: Because he was able to be brothers with this guy, I’m certain his older brother was infinitely good-natured.

“But, what does it mean?”

“In short, that idiot is posing as your spirit guide. My guess is that you have innate spiritual abilities. In anticipation of that, he was probably determined to stick by your side and take on the job of drawing out your abilities. Good grief...”

If you talk about him in this way, your older brother won’t be able to rest in peace.

“That method of entering a trance state was a technique Gene used often. On those occasions, it was a trait of his to perceive spirits as light and see the landscape as transparent. On top of that, he’d connect the line without permission.”

“Line?”

Naru looked truly disgusted.

“There was a hotline between Gene and myself. For direct communication between consciousness and consciousness.”

“Telepathy?”

Naru nodded.

“Although, it wasn’t at all useful with anyone other than my brother. He relayed that to you. That explains why you also saw the same vision.”

...Really?

“He should quickly cross over to the other side.”

It was an absolutely understandable sentiment, so I decided not to think of Naru as a heartless person. It would be painful for me, too, if my mother and father remained on this side forever.

“I bet he was really worried about you.”

“He should mind his own business.”

“Now, now. Eugene disappeared and there was no one left with the ability to see spirits, right? So then, he guided me so I could be useful somehow.”

I think he’s a kind older brother. If you take that for granted, you’ll regret it someday.

“He’s meddlesome.”

“That’s called kindness.”

“It’s also call stupid.”

...Good grief!

4

“Why did your brother come to Japan?”

I thought he might not answer, but...

“There was a request that wanted him to perform evocation. Also, there were stories of old-style spirit mediums all over Japan, so he was investigating that at the same time.”

“Hmm...”

It’s probably rude of me to ask at this point, but his brother was a spirit medium. He was also famous.

“Your brother was also doing that kind of research?”

“Yes.”

“Did you ghost hunt together?”

“We did.”

“I see.”

Undoubtedly, Naru would have been frustrated during investigations. Thinking, ‘I wish my brother was here.’ There are occasionally times when Masako can’t see anything and I’m a good-for-nothing psychic. While his brother could grasp a situation immediately and quickly perform a purification if necessary.

I recalled the method of spirit purification he taught me. He, who asserted that it was ‘easy’, must have been a genuinely gentle and warm person.

...And now, he’s dead.

At this moment, he’s sleeping at the bottom of the dam— “Your brother... how did you know he was here? Was it psychometry, after all?”

Naru nodded.

“Is that absolute? There’s no doubt?”

“Probably.”

“...Can I ask you how he died?”

Naru was silent as he contemplated for a moment. Then, “Gene left for Japan and was about half-way through his scheduled stay. When I borrowed his clothes, I suddenly synced with him.”

“Synced?”

“To assimilate with the target person while using psychometry.”

“Like the dream I once had?”

“Right.”

I couldn’t stand experiencing that over and over again. I would certainly hate using psychometry.

“Suddenly? You didn’t do something trying to sync with him deliberately?”

“That kind of intention isn’t always necessary. Rejecting it requires will, however. ”

“Oh...”

“I think the first thing I saw was a mountain. On that mountain during the day as I was walking there on the road, I heard a car coming from behind. As I turned around, I could see the car that had rounded the curve drive farther and farther toward the outside. It raced straight towards me, then there was an impact and I collapsed. As I was lying on the asphalt, someone got out of the stopped car.”

“...Uh-huh.”

“It was a woman. I could only see her below the knee, though. She panicked and, after screaming, returned to her car. After a moment, I could hear the sound of the car moving and approaching me from behind...”

I choked back something bitter. If that’s the case, then that woman finished Gene off. Without a doubt... you could say he was murdered...

“From there on, the vision developed a green halation. That’s characteristic of when the target is dead. I was dragged along the ground and loaded into the trunk of the car. In a place somewhere like a garage, I was wrapped in a silver tarp. That was thrown into a lake from atop a boat—”

“That’s awful...”

“Getting into an accident there in the first place was careless and stupid.”

...Again with that manner of speaking... Honestly!

“I hope you find him soon.”

That’s most likely why he’s wandering. Being this far away, he can never see his family again. He’s all alone at the bottom of the cold water.

...He probably wants to go home soon. To the place where he belongs.

Naru started to say something. He started to say something only to stop talking and sighed instead.

It was then that I heard a distant voice.

“Oh, this is where you were?”

It was a woman’s voice. It wasn’t Ayako’s voice and it also wasn’t Masako’s voice, but it was certainly a familiar voice.

When I looked around, I could see a woman waving from amidst the forest.

That person was...

“Oh, Taniyama-san. How are you?”

I’ve missed that bright smile.

It was that mysterious acquaintance of Naru and Lin-san that I once met.

“Madoka.”

“...Mori-san!?”

Chapter 14: August 14th 5:00 pm - 6:00 pm

1

Why is Mori-san here?

I soon understood why. Heedlessly following after Naru, who hurriedly went toward Mori-san, I caught sight of three people who were a little distance off.

—That's...

Two people were talking with Lin-san. A middle-aged man and woman. Moreover...

I unconsciously stopped walking.

They're f-foreigners...

—Why are foreigners here?

I felt as though I vaguely understood the answer. This was actually soon confirmed given that Naru rushed directly over to the pair.

The woman hugged Naru close. The man also put his arm around Naru's shoulders.

It was obvious who could do something like that without fear.

"Long time no see."

Mori-san suddenly appeared beside me.

"It has been a while. —Mori-san, are those people Naru's mother and father...?"

After smiling softly, Mori-san looked at Lin-san, who had similarly appeared beside me unnoticed.

"—I wonder if it's okay to introduce them?"

Lin-san nodded to her question.

"Good. —Taniyama-san, I'll introduce you. A little later."

I see. That time Lin-san said, “I heard they’ll depart from over there soon,” he was talking about Naru’s parents...

I don’t know how long it takes to travel from England to Japan. Still, I definitely think it was probably a very difficult trip. This place is where the body of their missing son is resting. Due to that fact, they’re reuniting with their other son who otherwise wouldn’t live separately in such a distant foreign country.

“Is everyone well?”

“Yes.”

“I see. Then, maybe I should go briefly welcome them.”

Mori-san momentarily looked off to the side, so I looked in the same direction. Naru’s mother seemed to be crying.

“Let’s not disturb them.”

“You’re right.”

When I returned to the bungalow with Mori-san, everyone was still there hanging around.

“Mori-san!”

“Wow!”

“Long time no see!”

Mori-san smiled at everyone’s voices and spent some time catching up with them.

“What brings you back all of a sudden?”

In response to Bou-san’s question, she explained that she was acting as a guide for Naru’s parents. While everyone was chatting animatedly, I pulled Masako aside.

“Hey, hey.”

“What’s wrong?”

“At one point, when you were captured, didn’t Naru go to where you were and cheer you up?”

After covertly looking around for a moment, Masako spoke in a hushed voice.

“...Yes. What about it?”

“Did you know that wasn’t Naru?”

“It was Naru.”

“No. It was his older brother.”

“That’s not possible. Because it was Naru.”

Yeah, I understand the feeling of saying that.

“No, it was his older brother... his twin.”

“Twin!?”

Masako cried out and the voices behind her suddenly stopped.

“Who are twins?”

Yasuhara-san asked and Mori-san laughed.

“Ah, Naru and Gene, right?”

“His older brother is his older twin brother?”

“Right. They’re identical twins.”

‘Whoa,’ Yasuhara-san muttered,

“...there were two of that face. That must have been a sight to see.”

D-definitely.

“Even though they’re called twins, aren’t there some that don’t look that similar?”

Mori-san gently laughed at Ayako’s comment.

“They were similar. When you line twins up side by side, there are things that are unexpectedly dissimilar, but those two were very similar. I think twins that similar are rare.”

I wonder what it would be like to have a twin brother. I don’t really know, but

I somehow feel like it would be much more intimate than a regular brother.

“I wonder if Naru’s personality become like that... because his brother died.”

It seemed sort of reasonable, but...

“Nope.”

Mori-san looked surprised.

“Naru’s always been like that.”

...gah!

“A-always? It's not because he’s carrying around a dark past and being cynical or something like that?”

“I don’t think so. I heard he’s been like that since he was little. Since Gene said it, I think it’s true.”

...Yikes.

Mori-san looked at the ceiling for a moment as if trying to remember something.

“You know... twins with looks that incredibly similar may be rare, but I think brothers with such different personalities is equally rare.”

“When you say different...”

“Exactly opposite.”

Ack! If one side is like that, then that means the opposite is...

Gentle, good-mannered, kind, modest...

“Like an a-angel?”

“A little different from that as well.”

Mori-san laughed.

“...Actually, Gene’s personality was probably normal, but because his other half was like that, he seemed like an incredibly good child.”

Well, naturally.

“Unlike Naru, he was the cheerful type. And he was friendly.”

Uh-huh.

“He also had a mischievous side. The twins often exchanged places and fooled the people around them. Naru doesn’t mess around like that, so that sort of thing was probably Gene’s suggestion.”

“...That’s a p-pretty surprising personality.”

It makes my head hurt when I think of someone with the same face as Naru doing that.

“He was just a bit like you, Taniyama-san. ”

Mori-san said so and gave me a warm smile.

...eh?

“Me?”

“Yeah. Although, it seems like he was a bit more of the quiet type.”

I’m sorry. I’m a noisy person.

“Lin also said so. That you’re similar.”

“...Huh?”

“Taniyama-san, you immediately sympathize with clients, right? You become completely absorbed with the people involved and laugh or cry with them?”

...Yeah, I have that sort of personality.

“He was similar in that regard. For that reason, everyone opened up to him...”

“Doesn’t that make him perfect?”

It Yasuhara-san who said this.

“With those looks, if his personality was good, he had nothing to fear.”

Mori-san smiled a somewhat wry smile.

“A child like that tends not to live long... Such is life.”

A somewhat sad tinged silence descended upon us. The sun had mostly set and everything in the room was covered in shadows.

2

“Surely, despite all that was said, they must have been close.”

After I said that to nobody in particular, Mori-san once again gave a wry smile.

“Hmm... I wonder about that. Gene was certainly the closest to Naru, though.”

“Were there brotherly quarrels?”

“All the time. But, for the most part, Naru would get angry one-sidedly.”

Ahh.

“...Yeah, Naru seemed to dislike Gene.”

“Even though they were brothers?”

“Yeah. Basically, Naru doesn’t like to be bothered by others. Whether it’s his brother or parents, I guess he’s the type who wants to be left alone. That kid’s only happy when researching and he seems to think everything apart from that is a hindrance.”

Hmm...

“But, while strangers will leave you alone, that’s not going to happen when it’s your family, right? If you seem sick, they’ll worry, and if you do something bad, they’ll scold you.”

“It’d be the end of it if you told them it was none of their business, right?”

“I don’t think that’ll work with family. Even if you don’t want to, you see them every day. If you cut ties with someone else, that’s the end of it, but you can’t do that with family.”

...Well, that’s true.

“So, if Gene hated Naru, they would have ended up being brothers who didn’t

get along, but Gene was a child who fundamentally didn't hate anyone."

"Hmm..."

"—So, to be honest, when Naru announced that he was going to search for Gene's body, I was surprised. I didn't expect him to do something like that."

To make Mori-san say so, that boy must've been staunch.

"When did he come to Japan?"

"I think it was about three months before Taniyama-san started working part-time. Around then."

"Umm, Mori-san, what kind of relationship do you have with Naru?"

clenched fists

Mori-san looked at me.

"Background check?"

"Yes. Openly and unashamedly this time."

When I said this, Mori-san gently laughed out loud.

"I'm, well, to put it simply, Naru's boss."

B-boss!?

Bou-san leaned forward slightly.

"You mean at 'SPR'?"

"Yes. Within 'SPR', there's what's known as Pratt Laboratory. I'm the chief of field research there. For now."

Whoaaaaa.

"Then, is Naru a researcher there?"

"Right. Both Naru and Lin."

After saying that, Mori-san gave a somewhat mixed smile.

"And Eugene."

...I see.

“So that’s why you were Naru’s master.”

“Right, back in the day. I instructed him starting with how to handle cameras, but before I knew it, he was better than me. As a result, it’s now my job to gather all the documents Naru sends and present them to the higher-ups.”

“Really?”

He’s certainly no match for his boss and master. Neither Naru nor Lin-san.

“Is Lin-san’s home also in England? Not Hong Kong?”

“That’s right. Lin’s family is part of the group that fled Hong Kong. Originally, the clan lived in England and it seems only Lin’s household remained in Hong Kong. Since the family over there is obstinate.”

“Obstinate?”

“They hate the Japanese, and they also hate the British.”

Hmm. I heard he hated the Japanese, but does that mean he hates the British? I wonder if he’s bearing a grudge over the [Opium Wars](#). ...Either way, it’s unfortunate that Lin-san always winds up going to countries he hates.

“London, then?”

...When all is said and done, though, I don’t know many of the names of the other cities in England.

“Lin’s family lives there. Lin himself lives in [Cambridge](#), though.”

I don’t know where that is or what kind of place it is.

“Isn’t ‘SPR’ in London?”

Bou-san cut in and Mori-san nodded.

“Yes, the main office is in London. The lab is in Cambridge. Lin was a researcher at the lab and a graduate student at Cambridge, so that’s why.”

“Really? ...So then, Naru, too?”

“Right. His father is a professor at Cambridge.”

Oh, I see. Cambridge where there’s Cambridge University, maybe?

“How was Naru handling school while in Japan? Leave of absence?”

“Right.”

“High school student?”

“University student. Of course, he went through the admission procedures, but he’s never gone.”

“Cambridge, perhaps?”

Cambridge University is a school where incredibly smart people go. I know that much.

“That’s right. Trinity College. [Wittgenstein](#)'s junior.”

“Huh?”

“Cambridge University is a generic name for over thirty colleges.”

“Hoowee. At seventeen? I guess he really is smart...”

Mori-san tilted her head slightly.

“Over there, they go to college from about the age of seventeen.”

“But he’s been in Japan the whole time, right? What about the entrance exam?”

“Ah, it was certainly a little earlier than usual to have qualified for admission to the university. He had already qualified when he arrived in Japan.”

“Is it similar to the [University Entrance Qualification Exam](#)?”

“Something like that. It seems there’s nothing like the entrance exam in Japan. He has three [A Level](#) qualification exams and achievements as a researcher, so I think he was exempted.”

“I see. As expected, he’s intelligent.”

That doesn’t surprise me. Uh-huh.

However, Mori-san laughed.

“Basically, he just wants to research what he likes as soon as possible. As you might expect, he was studying hard before the qualification exams. While reading a textbook, he was walking through the lab corridor and ran into a wall.”

...bbbbbbft.

“N-no way!”

Mori-san winked mischievously.

“What I said is a secret.”

“Okay.”

Naru ran into a wall! *giggle* “It’s amazing he didn’t demolish the wall in anger.”

“I don’t think he noticed at the time. Because he apologized to the wall.”

“Straight-faced?”

“Straight-faced.”

It’s no use. That’s comical.

3

As I was convulsing with laughter, I suddenly came to my senses and felt a cold gaze.

...Huh?

Many of the others were looking at me coldly.

“What’s the matter?”

As Bou-san sat cross-legged and rested his chin in his hand above his knee, “You’re good friends, aren’t you...”

“Yeah. Do you want to join the club?”

“Want to join...”

Come on. It’s okay to be honest.

“There’s one thing I want to ask, Miss.”

“What is it?”

“In the demonstration video...”

“You’re changing the conversation to serious topics like that again!”

fuming

“Mai’s conversation is just gossip.”

“Nya! That’s why you reek of old man!”

“You’re a child!”

“Teehehe. You’re jealous of my youth, huh?”

“Shut up!”

After saying that, Bou-san suddenly said, “Which reminds me, Miss, how old is Lin?”

Mori-san laughed out loud.

“I’m sure he’s older than you, Takigawa-san.”

“That’s a relief.”

Saying that so seriously is evidence you’re an old man. You’re glad you’re not the oldest, huh?

“—That’s not what I wanted to talk about. Didn’t Naru-bou collapse that time he filmed the demonstration video? It would probably be extremely exhausting to throw a 50-kilo mass.”

...You really changed it to a serious topic. Old people are persistent.

Mori-san momentarily searched for words.

“...How should I say this... There’s a reason Naru gets exhausted.”

“Oh?”

“It wasn’t necessary for him to get that exhausted before. That is to say, Eugene functioned as an amplifier.”

“How’s that?”

“I’m sorry. I don’t understand it well, either. However, when Naru tossed ch’i to Gene, he amplified it and sent it back. It seems it was that sort of phenomenon. As they repeated the toss over and over, the ch’i grew. Therefore, I don’t think it was necessary for Naru to exhaust himself too much.”

...Hmm.

“In truth, I don’t really know. Naru didn’t do too many psychic ability experiments. Even if he did an experiment, it was too extraordinary and couldn’t be analyzed. It seems he himself isn’t too interested in psychic ability research, either.”

“Oh.”

“Also, it seems there was quite the supernatural phenomenon between those twins, but that also wasn’t clear. The pair didn’t talk about it and it was only possible between the brothers, so they almost never did experiments with it. Luella— their mother hated them being used as guinea pigs.”

...I don't really get it. But Mori-san is also an expert.

"I see..."

After nodding to Bou-san's voice, Mori-san became slightly serious.

"Just to be sure, please keep this to yourself. It would be trouble if it reached the ears of the mass media."

"...I understand your feelings, but you don't have to be so serious."

If it's Naru, I think a TV interview will be cut short by that sharp tongue.

"It would be trouble if photos happened to appear in the mass media."

"Why? Well, girls will make a racket in no time flat..."

"That's not it."

Huh?

"Gene died in this country. If you believe Naru's testimony, you might say he was murdered."

"...Yeah."

"The culprit is probably someone from this country. What do you think the culprit would do if she saw the same face as the person she murdered?"

"—Oh."

"It depends on who the culprit is, but it could possibly be extremely dangerous, right? Therefore, I want to keep it a secret from the press."

I see. You're right.

...It's serious.

'By the way,' Mori-san said in a very light tone, attempting to lift the heavy atmosphere that had suddenly descended, and looked at Bou-san.

"I heard Takigawa-san is a fan of Naru's."

—Huh?

After everyone tilted their heads to the side, we all burst into laughter simultaneously.

“Uh-huh. Bou-san is a huge fan of Dr. Davis.”

“Yay! That’s great. I can tell you a bunch.”

“Don’t you want to get his signature?”

“He's someone you know, so it’s an easy victory.”

“You even exposed yourself as a fan to the Doctor. You praised him a lot in his presence.”

“That’s right.”

Bou-san clutched his head in his hands.

“Please, I’m asking you, don’t say that. ...I'm trying really hard not to think about it.”

He seemed to be truly miserable, lol.

He would have been happier not knowing. Mm-hmm.

It happened as we were stupidly laughing. There was the sound of a knock, to which Ayalo replied. Lin-san was the one who opened the door.

“Is Madoka here?”

“I’m here!”

Mori-san smiled and before she could raise her hand, Lin-san spoke sternly.

“—They found him.”

Everyone rose to their feet.

Chapter 15: August 14th 6:00 pm and Beyond

1

When we rushed out of the bungalow, a crowd full of several curious onlookers was gathered by the water's edge.

The area was heavy with signs of twilight. The shore was caught in the shadow of the mountain, and the perimeter of the boat on the shadowless lake was brilliant as if illuminated. The surface of the water was glistening in the setting sun.

The black head of the diver appeared at the surface of the water near the motorboat. A hand extended from the inside of the boat and was given a rope. As the person on the boat pulled the rope, some sort of dull-grey mass of cloth soon rose to the surface of the water. The underwater diver got into the boat and the boat began to move. It headed toward the shore.

Watching that scene, it felt like we were observing some kind of ritual.

The boat arrived at the shore. It touched ground at the water's edge and stopped. When the diver, who jumped down, pulled on the rope, a grey.... No, something wrapped in a dirty silver tarp was hauled forward. It was brought to the water's edge. From among the people who were watching from a short distance off, a single figure began walking to the water's edge. It was Naru.

Naru crouched beside the mass of cloth that had been pulled up. He reached out a hand and the middle-aged diver could be heard trying to stop him.

"Don't do it."

"No, I'm fine."

Naru's voice was calm. He lacked expression.

Naru knelt on the tarp. Stretching out his white hand, he turned up the sheet. From the edge of the bundled tarp, a small bit of jet-black hair could be seen peeking out. The diver, who was beside him, averted his eyes.

Naru stared fixedly at that... then he replaced the tarp with a steady hand. Remaining silent, he stood to his feet and began to walk along the water's edge. His profile was tranquil with neither tears nor traces of suffering.

It became an uproar after that. However, Masako, Ayako, and I, followed by Mori-san, quickly left that place and returned to the bungalow. We brought Naru's mother with us.

Naru's father is Martin Davis. His mother's name seems to be Luella Davis. According to Mori-san, his father is apparently called Professor Davis to distinguish from Naru, who received a doctorate. I'm not sure of their age, but I think it's slightly older than our mother and father's age.

Also, Professor Davis has brownish red hair and Mrs. Davis has magnificently blonde hair. The Professor's eyes are blue and hers are violet.

Mrs. Davis cried a lot. It was sad and I felt sorry for her, but I was at a loss for words to comfort her. After a long time had passed and it had become dark outside the window, Mrs. Davis at last raised her face from where it had been resting on Mori-san's shoulder.

"Please, excuse me."

Her Japanese had a slightly unsteady feeling.

"I'm sorry, for not greeting you."

Everyone shook their heads and after seeing that with her tear-swollen eyes, she asked, "Do you understand my Japanese?"

"It's very good."

When Masako said that, Mrs. Davis finally smiled. Even so, it was painful to see her mouth trembling as she smiled.

"Those two would talk secretly in Japanese, so I studied the language. However, Japanese is difficult. I can't speak it well. I'm sorry."

'Those two' probably meant Naru and his older brother.

"Thank you so much for taking very good care of Naru."

“Not at all. Thank you, too.”

Masako bowed and Ayako stood up.

“I’ll refresh the tea. Since it’s cooled down.”

“Um... My condolences.”

When I said this, Mrs. Davis looked at Mori-san. Mori-san said something in English, then Mrs. Davis smiled at me.

“Thank you very much. Are you Taniyama-san?”

“Yes, that’s right. It’s a pleasure to meet you.”

“It’s a pleasure to meet you, too. Naru can be difficult since he’s a serious person. Thank you very much.”

Since she said so, she must know I’m working part-time at the office.

“He really is a bit difficult, isn’t he?”

When I said this, Mrs. Davis laughed.

“But he’s a good child.”

“I know.”

“I’m very proud of both of them.”

Saying that, she opened her hand, which held a handkerchief. In her palm, she had a business-card sized picture frame. She gently caressed it. When I tried to peer into it, she handed it over.

“I’m very proud.”

There were two boys in the picture. They had the same face. The same stature. One’s expression was somewhat more gentle than the other’s. It was two Narus.

“...Gene?”

I pointed to one. Mrs. Davis nodded.

They were really similar. Gene was smiling and Naru was frowning slightly.

“It’s like there are two Genes.”

Masako said as she looked on from the other side. I definitely think so.

Rather than two Narus, it felt as if there were two Genes present in the picture. I understood the reason immediately. Naru was wearing a navy blue sweater. His shirt was dungaree. It was the first time I had seen Naru dressed like that.

...Oh, I see.

I understand.

Those... were for mourning.

All black clothes. They were for Gene.

—For the half he had lost.

Suddenly, tears nearly spilled out, but I quickly fought them back. I have no right to cry in front of his mother. First of all, this sorrow belongs to those who knew Gene well and loved him.

I returned the picture frame to Mrs. Davis. She grasped it in her palm as though it was very important.

“Poor Gene.”

Mrs. Davis said with tears in her eyes once again.

“I think it’s painful for Naru, too. Poor thing.”

“Yes...”

“Though they were born together, it’s wrong for them to be separated like this. It’s truly cruel.”

“I think so, too.”

When I said that, I became tearful and couldn’t hold back. I stood up on the spot and quickly went outside.

2

"I'm a mess..."

I rested my back against a tree in the forest. Moonlight was shining down.

Even though I shouldn't cry, even though there are people who are hurting more than me, even though I should be offering comfort and encouragement...

Despite that, if I don't look upward, my tears will spill over.

My chest really hurts. ...It's painful.

I don't really understand why it's so painful.

"Hmph."

I want to cry. But I don't want to cry.

So, I was relieved when I was called out to.

"What are you doing?"

That disgusted tone of voice belonged to Naru. When I scrubbed my face and looked in the direction of the voice, I saw Naru, who looked truly disgusted.

"Do you intend to eat the moon? Even if you wait with your mouth open, the moon won't fall in."

...I swear, he's foul-mouthed!

Still, thanks to that my tears have subsided, so I'll forgive him in this instance.

"I don't particularly want to eat it."

"Where's Luella?"

To think that he calls his mother so.

"She's in our bungalow. ...What about your brother?"

"The police took him away."

“Hmm...”

I wonder why he's this indifferent. It's a little irritating that he's completely the same as always.

“You're not being honest...”

“What?”

Naru, who began walking towards the light of the bungalow, looked back.

“You sourpuss! Can't you just cry freely?”

“It isn't necessarily something to cry over.”

“But you're sad, aren't you?”

Naru gave me a slightly cynical smile.

“Unfortunately, I'm a stupid person who doesn't understand the subtleties of emotions.”

This guy's holding a grudge.

“You're not honest.”

“Everyone dies.”

His voice was quiet.

“In a hundred years, not a single person we know will be alive.”

“That isn't the point.”

“That is the point.”

He's a truly obstinate person.

I looked up at the moon.

“You're going back to England...”

“Yeah.”

It's okay to tell him. At this point.

“Umm... I liked you.”

“I heard more than enough about how favorably you view me this afternoon.”

“Idiot. That’s not what I meant.”

I looked at Naru. He was looking at me a little strangely, so I couldn’t help laughing.

“You’re slow.”

“What?”

“Well, I liked you in a very special way.”

Naru stared back at me. His pupils were jet-black. He tilted his head slightly, then his white face smiled faintly.

“Me? —Or Gene?”

For a moment, I was dumbfounded.

What is he suggesting?

“That’s...”

That sort of thing... that’s obvious, isn’t it?

Naru’s going back. So, I thought I’d tell him. Because I won’t be able to see him anymore. Before long.

...We’ll never meet again.

I’ll never see that smile. He’ll never show up again in any of my dreams.

I couldn’t answer. Sad and regretful, I burst into tears.

“But... I didn’t know!”

I didn’t know. That wasn’t Naru. I never realized he was no longer in this world. I was sure that one day Naru would smile at me like that. Even though he never smiles like that.

“I didn’t know... I had no idea.”

He always helped me and encouraged me, but I didn’t even thank him. I was mistaken the whole time and got it wrong until the end.

“I always called him Naru.”

That’s all I ever called him. I never once tried to get to know the real him.

My chest hurts. It's so painful I want to die.

I crouched on the spot and cried aloud.

3

After a long while had passed, my breathing calmed and I was finally able to lift my head.

“At any rate...”

Hearing his voice nearby, I was surprised. Looking to the side, I found Naru standing right next to me. I thought he had left a long time ago, so I was a bit stunned.

“At any rate, you’ll meet him again whether or not you want to.”

He kept his pale face turned away.

“...After a hundred years or so...?”

“In your case, it might be close to two hundred years.”

“Hmph.”

Oddly, my strength deserted me, and I sat down on the ground.

“I’ll definitely live long. You’ll be amazed since I’m a stupid klutz.”

“Probably.”

“I wish you’d deny it instead.”

“Don’t you think it’s better to face the truth?”

Hmph.

“...You should have told me. If you had explained the situation properly from the beginning, I wouldn’t have made that mistake. I blame you.”

“It was stupid of you to jump to conclusions. Do I have that sort of meddlesome personality?”

“That’s true...”

When I laughed, tears spilled out again.

“It seems silly... Without knowing the truth, I let myself be easily affected by your actions.”

“Oh?”

In the forest at night, with the moonlight shining down, the insects were softly singing.

“It’s the perfect mood.”

“Huh?”

I looked upward and stuck out my tongue.

“Until just a while ago, it would have been an absolutely exciting situation.”

“It’d be a bother if you expected the same on my part.”

“I would have. A girl’s heart is like that.... And yet, when I think about it being a completely different person, it no longer holds the same value.”

After I said that, I chastised myself.

“...not good. That was an extremely rude thing to say, wasn’t it? Sorry.”

“It’s alright. I’m used to it.”

When I looked up at his indifferent voice, Naru raised his eyebrows a little.

“The same face and same level of talent. One has a good personality and the other a bad one. —Which would you choose?”

“The one with a good personality.”

“Exactly.”

...I see.

“You’re... a rather pitiful person, aren’t you?”

His brother probably always got all the girls.

“It was quiet, which I was glad of.”

“Idiot scientist.”

Naru looked at me, so I laughed.

“Gene said you were, ‘just an idiot scientist.’”

Naru sighed. I laughed at that and stood up.

“Your outward appearances are really similar, but you’re completely different on the inside.”

“I’m sorry I couldn’t meet your expectations.”

“Yup. If your personality was even a little similar, I’d swoon.”

I’m saying a lot of rude things. I’m sorry. Forgive me. If I don’t do this right now, I won’t have the strength to stand.

“I already have enough.”

I laughed.

“Is there perhaps someone you like?”

When I asked, Naru seemed a bit surprised.

“Me?”

“I see... I guess there’s no one after all. For a moment, I thought there was someone in England you wanted to see.”

I’ll ask for Masako’s sake. I’m so kind.

“There’s a woman I’ve been chasing after for about five years now.”

“No way! Seriously?”

“...A woman in Wimbledon.”

“The Wimbledon of tennis?”

“Yes. Living in the attic of an old house.”

“How old is she? Is she a beautiful person?”

“I don’t know. Her age seems to be over eighty.”

...crestfallen.

“She is alive, right?”

Naru laughed a little.

“I can get exceptionally clear data from her. She only appears around this time of the year, so I’m thinking about going to see her first thing when I get back home.”

...Good grief. He seems genuinely happy about it.

“...It would be nice to meet even once a year like that.”

I won’t say with whom.

“You should probably accept that you won’t be able to meet.”

“I know.”

His profile, exposed to the moon, was really similar. Enough to make me cry.

“I loved his beautiful smile.”

“I see.”

“It was really, really beautiful.”

“Yeah—”

4

“Mai, are you okay?”

Being spoken to by Ayako, I woke up. Ugh, it's bright.

“Mornin...”

“Are you okay? Your eyes are swollen.”

“Wow...”

“You should cool them down.”

Masako handed me a wet towel.

“I give up. My eyes won't open.”

“You were weeping uncontrollably in the middle of the night.”

“Yeah. When I woke up in the middle of the night, I couldn't help crying. It seems I was somehow expecting to see him in my dreams last night.”

Last night, after I returned to the bungalow, I talked to Ayako and Masako about everything. Somehow, I couldn't keep silent.

“Here, eye drops. Put them in.”

“Thanks...”

Uuh. The eye drops, along with the morning sun, stung my eyes.

When I got out a hand mirror and peered into it, my eyes were really swollen and my wretched face was bloated.

“Ugh...”

“Here, cool them properly.”

“Hey, the concept of deep, tragic love is beautiful, but the reality of it is unseemly, isn't it?”

“Why are you talking seriously about such nonsense? Do you feel like spending the day with that face?”

Ye~s.

I laid down and placed the wet towel over my face. It felt really good.

“I’m going to make today’s breakfast with the others. I’ll bring yours over here, so sleep for a little while.”

I heard Ayako’s voice and the sound of the entrance door open, so I fluttered my hand with the towel still on my face.

“Hey, Masako~”

“What is it?”

“I thought seriously last night, but you have a chance.”

I heard a light sigh.

“Just when I was wondering what you might say... Don’t worry. Even I thought so myself.”

“Really?”

“All I have to do is go see him. It’s not like I can’t buy a plane ticket. Although, I doubt whether he would meet with me even if I went to see him.”

“It’ll be fine.”

“Is that so?”

“Yeah. Until now, I’m sure Naru didn’t have any feelings to spare. He was completely occupied with looking for Gene.”

“I hope that’s so, but...”

Yeah. There’s definitely still doubt.

“I’m telling you, there’s hope. A long time ago, Masako, you would hold arms with Naru, right? He didn’t pull away from you, so I bet that means he wasn’t as annoyed as he would have us believe.”

I heard Masako sigh.

“I think that’s different.”

“Different?”

It seems that’s just Naru’s personality.”

“Huh?”

“It seems it’s extremely difficult for him to deal with being clung to.”

....Oh?

“I think he gets confused about what to do. When I first took his arm, he went rigid for about a minute.”

I sat up. The towel fell and I could see Masako.

“...Really?”

A minute would mean it’s real.

“Really.”

“...Oh. But you often deliberately take his arm.”

Masako turned her head away irritably.

“Even I thought I was being a little shameless, but he didn’t understand at all.”

“Oh, I see.”

“I realized he was uncomfortable with it. After that, I did it just to harass him.”

“Exhibiting that sort of warped regard isn’t good.”

“I know. That’s why I haven’t been doing it lately.”

“Great! Do your best~ If you don’t hurry, I’ll enter the war again.”

“By all means.”

Whoa. Such confidence.

“You don’t mind if I become serious? No matter how you look at it, their faces are similar.”

“I won’t hand him over to someone with such impure intentions.”

“Ahahaha.”

“If you intend to participate in the war, you should do something about that face.”

She slapped the towel over my eyes.

“He~y.”

“I’m going to go over there to help, but cool your eyes properly. If you cry any further, you’ll be too frightful to be seen twice. After all, your base is your base.”

“Mind your own business. Anyway, I’m not as beautiful as you, Masako.”

“Oh, you’re just now saying such an obvious thing?”

“Damn you.”

When I removed the towel and tried to hit her, Masako was already out of range.

“Goodnight.”

She waved at me with a beautiful smile.

“Yeah, yeah. Night.”

...I’m okay. I won’t cry.

There’s no greater parting than this, but my feelings weren’t denied. I think I’ll be depressed for a while, but I’ll recover fully someday.

It hurts right now, but... it really hurts, but humans can’t always be optimistic. It can’t be helped. Surely everyone has experienced such pain as well, and I expect they got over it properly. Life is like that.

...What a brazen thing for me to say.

“I wonder what it was he wanted to say...”

That’s the one thing that bothered me.

Those words of Gene’s the last time we met.

—There was something I wanted to say, but...

Not all of the mysteries have been solved. Perhaps that’s also life.

Epilogue

If there's someone who's going away, it's common practice in Japan to hold a farewell party.

I don't remember who in the bungalow suggested giving a farewell party. However, I remember everyone quickly agreed. To be honest, the two we're sending off hate festivities. So, this is deeply affectionate harassment.

The truth is, there's no one in our group who can say, "We're having a farewell party," and drag those two along, but we're strong this time since Mori-san is with us.

The day after Gene's body was found, it was returned from the police, cremated, and sent directly to his home country by plane. Naru's parents returned to England ahead of the others, and Naru, Lin-san, and Mori-san were to return soon after that.

—It was on that day, before those three went to Narita, that we decided to hold the farewell party.

I headed to Shinjuku considerably earlier than the appointed time. This was under the pretense that I had something I wanted to ask Mori-san. To be honest, my ulterior motive was simply to get a quick look at the place where the secretive Naru-chan had been living.

Skyscrapers lined up around the vicinity of Shinjuku West Entrance. The so-called Shinjuku Subcenter. That was the location of the designated hotel and venue of the farewell party.

I called from the Tokyo Metropolitan Government Building and asked Mori-san if I could visit her. She readily said, "Let's have a cup of tea until it's time." Half-nervous and half-excited, I headed to the entrance of the luxury hotel.

When I looked into the specified tea room, Mori-san was sitting directly in front and raised her head.

“Hello~”

“Hello. Have you finished all the preparations for your departure?”

“Yeah. I don’t have much luggage anyway.”

“Thank you for meeting with me when you're busy. It wasn’t that important, but I was curious what kind of place this was.”

When I said that while ordering, Mori-san laughed in a pleasant, hitch-pitched tone.

“You’re honest.”

“Eheheheh. —Where are Naru and Lin-san?”

“They’re probably organizing their luggage since there’s still time.”

“It must be difficult.”

After all, we returned from Nagano yesterday. I expect they haven’t had any time to sleep.

“For the time being, they’ll send as much as they can, and if they don’t finish packing in time, I guess they’ll send the rest at some other time.”

“Will they be coming back?”

Mori-san tilted her head to one side.

“Hmm... I think I might be the only one coming back.”

“Really? I wonder what I should do. I can’t afford to wait, then.”

“What’s the matter?”

“I wanted to know Naru and Lin-san’s addresses. I was hoping I could write them letters.”

“Ah, I see.”

“If it’s not okay to have their addresses, I thought I’d have you tell me the lab address. Then I can send the letters addressed there, right?”

Mori-san smiled.

“I don’t think there’s anything wrong with it. Why don’t you ask them personally?”

“Is that alright?”

“I’m sure it’s fine. They’re not particularly secretive by nature. —Although, I think it’s best not to expect a reply.”

“Probably.”

I released a sigh. Mori-san smiled wryly,

“Lin-san is quite conscientious, so he’ll probably write a reply right away. ... But Naru...”

Well, I already figured that.

“By the way, have you heard what’s happening with the office? I haven’t returned my spare key...”

The office hasn’t opened at all. It’s remained closed for the time being. I have some personal effects there, but I haven’t had the time to go for them.

“Anything you have questions about, ask personally. I’ll tell you whatever those two don’t.”

Saying so with a smile, Mori-san pointed up.

“Go on. Room number 3212.”

I followed Mori-san’s finger and looked up at the ceiling.

“...I wonder if it’s okay to go.”

Somehow, I feel like I’ll be treated very unkindly.

“You’ll lose if you hold back.”

Mori-san said so and smiled.

“...Huh?”

“The trick to dealing with Naru is, more or less, to be assertive. That child won’t interact with others of his own accord, so if you hold back, your ties with him will be cut.”

“But, if I don’t hold back, I feel like he’ll yell at me.”

“It’s quite alright. Even when people gather at the office, he doesn't get particularly angry, right?”

Ah, now that I think about it...

“He gets in a bad mood, but I don’t think he gets angry.”

“Don’t worry even if he gets in a bit of a bad mood. If you try to gauge how he’s feeling by his expression, you’ll lose. If he’s seriously angry, he’ll become unresponsive, so it’s fine if he’s being sarcastic.”

“Really?”

“Therefore, someone who’s assertive wins. If he complains, ignore it. If he’s sarcastic, shake it off. If you do that, you’ll be able to deal with him.”

“As long as my patience lasts?”

When I said that, Mori-san laughed pleasantly.

“Right. As long as you plan to associate with him.”

“I see.”

“Naru appears extremely strong-willed, but when it comes down to it, he gives in surprisingly easy.”

...Perhaps she has a point.

“Now that you mention it, even when he argues, I can pretty much win. As long as I don’t back down.”

“See?”

I looked upward.

“Well then, I guess I’ll try being assertive.”

Mori-san smiled.

“Good luck!”

I rode the long elevator and walked down the peculiar hotel hallway. I took a

deep breath in front of room 3212. When all's said and done, pressing the doorbell requires as much courage as sticking your finger into a tiger's cage.

A chime sounded inside and the door immediately opened. Naru appeared. As soon as he saw me, he looked down at his wristwatch.

"Is it that time already?"

"No. It's a great deal earlier. There's something I wanted to ask and after meeting with Mori-san, she told me to try asking personally."

Naru frowned slightly in annoyance.

"Can you do it later?"

...As expected, his guard concerning his privacy is firm.

"Yes..."

Dejected. ...But I mustn't back down.

"Can I help with anything?"

"There's no need."

"A person's kindness is something you should readily accept."

"If you help, what needs to be done won't get finished."

"That's not true. I'll be more useful than a cat. Leave it to me."

"I told you, there's no need."

"When you can take it easy, you should. There are things I wanted to ask. It's reasonable if I ask while I help you clean up. Right?"

I imitated Mori-san, grinning and such.

...Then Naru sighed.

Whoa! I won. I see, this is what I had to do.

Naru opened the door wide and gestured to the inside of the room.

The room was a spacious and tidy double room. There was a large window with the curtains opened; Shinjuku Central Park was visible directly below. It's certainly a nice room, but I have to admit it feels bleak. When I think about him

having lived in such a place for more than a year and a half, I can't help feeling a little sorry for him.

"Lin-san's room is next door?"

"Yes."

There were several cardboard boxes stacked up in the middle of the room.

"Will you pack my clothes? You can fold them however you want."

"Okay."

He opened a door, revealing a closet that had already been half cleaned out. The sight of nothing but black clothes hanging up was slightly laughable. Naru was packing files stacked on top of a desk into a box.

"Your home is in Cambridge, right?"

"That's right."

"Will you tell me your address?"

"What for?"

"To write you a letter. Why else?"

Be assertive. Be assertive.

"...Can you write the address in English?"

What!?

"I can do that much."

"I underestimated you, then."

He's really not cute!

Oh, what a pity. If Gene were alive, and by some chance we happened to get married, I'd be this guy's sister.

"Your father is a professor at Cambridge, right?"

"What about it?"

"What does he teach?"

"Does knowing that have anything to do with you?"

“Of course it does.”

“Really?”

“It will satisfy my curiosity.”

Naru sighed deeply again.

“...Law.”

After saying that, Naru smiled wryly.

“Parapsychology, also.”

“Really? In addition to the ‘SPR’?”

“The ‘SPR’ is something like an academic society. Four years ago, it came to directly manage a laboratory, but he’s not a researcher.”

Hmm. I don’t really understand.

“You’re a researcher?”

“Yes.”

“At Mori-san’s lab. The Fieldwork Lab?”

“If you know, don’t bother asking.”

...Hmph.

“Hey, what’s fieldwork?”

Naru looked at me with raw contempt.

“You really don’t know anything, do you?”

That’s none of your business.

“It’s actually going to a site and gathering information. Things like investigating a haunted house. It’s almost the same as what we do now.”

“Really?”

“After sending off the video and data, the rest is another team's work. Such as the video analysis team. Similarly, organizing the analyzed data and incorporating it into theory is also the job of a specialized team. More or less.”

“More or less?”

“I’m actually a theorist. Lin is primarily a mechanical specialist.”

“So why...?”

Why did you come all the way to Japan together?

“Madoka is the chief of fieldwork. So, she gathered all the people who could speak Japanese and it ended up this way.”

“Ah, I see.”

That might be just like Mori-san.

When I indicated that I was finished packing his clothes in the box, Naru tossed me the packing tape. Catching it, I shut the box.

“...So?”

“So?”

“What will you do after going home?”

Naru shrugged his shoulders.

“Hold a funeral.”

Who’s talking about that near in the future?

“I didn’t mean that. You’re a researcher at ‘SPR’, right? Will you still keep ghost hunting at the lab?”

“Naturally, that’s what I intend to do.”

“What are you going to do with the office? Just in case, I brought Taka’s spare key, too.”

“You can hold onto it.”

—Eh?

I looked at Naru.

“Madoka will return soon.”

“The office is staying, then!?”

“You’re lucky you won’t lose your part-time job.”

Yeah. —Or rather...

“What changed your mind?”

He had said he was going to close it.

“A change in circumstances. We obtained permission to maintain the branch office.”

Wow!

“But you’re not coming back, are you?”

“I’m the one who submitted the request, wasn’t I?”

“And again, why?”

“The spiritual phenomena in Japan are interesting.”

“...Is that so?”

“For some reason, there seem to be good conditions for spiritual phenomena. So, I thought we should keep the branch office the way it is and submitted a request.”

He’s a workaholic to the core.

“But what are you going to do about university?”

“I’ve been thinking about what to do. I could withdraw or I could apply to study abroad.”

“Then you won’t return soon.”

Naru smiled wryly.

“It’ll be impossible for a while.”

As I expected...

“If nothing else, my parents wouldn’t like it. I’ll have to stay for a while.”

“I suppose so.”

Only one half of the twins remained at home. It’s unlikely they’d let him stay in such a distance country forever.

“Um, I heard they’re not your real parents...”

“That’s right. I’m adopted.”

“That means you were an orphan.”

When I said that, Naru lightly raised his brows.

“Just like you, right?”

...No way.

“Hey, is that maybe why you gave me a part-time job?”

“What’s the saying? Mutual sympathy? Mutual pity?”

“Fellow sufferers pity each other.”

“I heard you were an orphan from your school principal. Although, I thought your living conditions were much harsher.”

“Were yours harsh?”

“The orphanage? It was terrible. On top of that, I was a problem child.”

...No doubt.

“I see. ...Thank you. It helped a great deal, actually.”

“That’s good. —Anyway, there was room left in the budget. And we really didn’t have enough workers.”

Whoa.

“The ‘SPR’ is rich.”

“We’re different among research institutes. I’m special.”

“Really?”

“I’ve been given an annual research budget of approximately 100, 000 pounds by a certain individual.”

“Oh? How much is a 100, 000 pounds?”

“One pound is about 230 yen. You don’t know something like that?”

It’s different when it’s the dollar, but I don’t usually know something like the pound.

“To be exact, it’s a 150, 000 US dollars.”

“One dollar is about 160 yen, right?”

Humph! I know that much.

“Right. ...So?”

“So. That means 150, 000 is...”

Umm... is there no paper? Paper!

“Twenty-four million. You really are stupid.”

“Shut up.”

After I said that, my face went pale. The sorrow of a commoner.

“Tw—twenty-four... million yen!?”

“That’s not such a large amount.”

“It is!”

“It’s gone after buying one camera.”

“Your sense on money matters is abnormal.”

“I may use it at my discretion, though it doesn’t cover the cost of living.”

“Well, of course.”

I said, then looked around the room.

“What about the cost to stay here?”

“It’s covered by benevolent contributions.”

“I’d like to see the face of the person who gives you benevolence like it’s water.”

“There are some who are good at judging people.”

“You phony.”

“If I act the part, I might be able to get double the current amount.”

He had an oddly serious tone, so I inadvertently sighed.

We finished packing in time, and when we hurried into the small room at the hotel restaurant, everyone was already present.

“Mai~ I heard.”

Ayako waved her hand.

“Hmm?”

“The office is staying, right?”

“Yeah. That’s right~”

“Isn’t that great? You don’t have to worry about supporting yourself.”

“Lucky you. You don’t have to worry about me leeching off of you.”

“My purse isn’t so small as to be troubled by a petty bourgeois like you leeching off of me.”

...Oh? That’s good to know. I’ll leech off you, then.

As Mori-san handed me a glass,

“I’ll be the stand in director for a while. Let’s do our best.”

“Alright! Likewise.”

Hehehe. It’s going to be a friendly workplace.

“What are you going to do, Lin-san?”

After I asked, Lin-san remained expressionless, “I’ll be returning for a while.”

“I see. Please be careful.”

“—Thanks.”

That’s right. There was something I wanted to ask him before it’s too late.

“Umm..., there was a time before when we talked about how you hate the Japanese, right?”

“There was.”

“At that time, was it Gene who said the same thing as me?”

After blinking for a moment, Lin-san nodded.

“...I see.”

It’s true. My and Gene’s way of thinking is a little similar. Hehehe. I’m happy.

While we were at the campsite, Mori-san told me a lot of things about him and I liked him even more than before. There's no longer any hope, but there's also no chance of being rejected, so in a way, it might be a good deal.

As I was grinning like a fool, my gaze met Naru's. He looked slightly appalled.

"What~"

"Nothing."

"Just now, you were thinking I'm a simpleton, weren't you?"

"How well you understand."

Hmph. I'm just a simple-minded person.

"—Oh, that's right. I almost forgot."

Naru removed a small bundle from the inside pocket of his jacket.

"Here."

—Hmm?

Wrapped in a men's handkerchief, it was business card sized, and a bit thick and hard. When I opened it, it was the picture frame that Naru's mother had.

Pictured in the photo was Naru and *him*, who was smiling.

...My chest hurts. I'm happy. And sad.

"...What's with this?"

Ah, I don't even have a picture of him. Even a small group photo with him would be nice, so I wish I could keep this with me.

"Luella forgot it. I don't think she cares if I get rid of it."

"...I can have it?"

Really?

"I threw it away. I don't know what happened to it after that."

My hand's a garbage can?

...Oh, well. I'm happy.

"Thank you..."

Naru's a pretty nice guy after all. Eheheheh.

"What are grinning you about?"

Bou-san grasped me by the nape of the neck.

"It's a secret."

It'd be wasted on him, so I hid it.

"Oh? I'd like to hear it."

"Hmm..."

"Tell me. Give it up."

"—Did you know love continues until you forget the other person?"

Bou-san blinked a little in surprise, then grinned.

"You've gotten cheeky, haven't you?"

"Have I?"

The pocket that concealed the picture frame was warm.

You can be in love even if you're alone, so I won't cry anymore.

</noinclude